

Puppet Show by Mylesime

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Summary:

"He likes the pain better than the darkness. It's something he chooses."

Discontinued

1. Chapter 1

Notes for the Chapter:

Dear all,

I don't know why I wrote that story but it'd been stuck in my head for a while now.

WARNING: very, very dark, heavy self destruction, disturbing content

Mike is the first boy Will helps. They start around the age of twelve, fumbling with each other, experimenting. It's mostly Will doing all the work, Mike being at the receiving end. Will never complains. He loves touching Mike like this and making him feel good. And Mike is beautiful and he loves him so very much, it makes him happy. Sure, he sometimes wishes Mike would reciprocate - how wonderful it would feel - but knows he isn't into that sort of things.

It's probably because Will is that the Demogorgon chose him.

He comes out at the age of fifteen and Mike doesn't want Will's help anymore. They stopped doing anything the moment Mike started dating girls anyway. It makes Will sad of course but Will understands. He is a freak and Mike isn't. He doesn't want him to believe they'd be freaks together. Being crazy has its limits.

So Will goes crazy on his own.

The rumor spreads in school. Other boys come to him for his help. Ironically, they're mostly straight, older boys in need of relief and know that Will, being the good Samaritan that he is, always agrees to help. There isn't much of a difference between a girl's mouth or Will's anyway, so it doesn't make them fags. Will is a fag alone and he's fine with it. He gets to touch very pretty boys, like Jared, the Captain of the football team. Will likes Jared. He always gives Will free cigarettes for his trouble afterwards. They all say Will is good at it and it makes Will proud. If he has to be a fag, better be a useful one. Besides, he likes doing it. It's fun.

He still misses Mike however, and can't help but look at him with complete adoration, wishing he'd come for his help again. He has greatly improved since the last, awkward head he gave him in fifth grade. He would make it so good for him. So good for his Mike.

But Mike never comes. Mike barely looks at him.

Sometimes, it's just one boy. Others, a whole group. Will doesn't care. He likes the feel of it when there are several hands on him anyway, when they leave him bruised and aching all over, when he's wet with blood and semen, when they laugh and spit on him. It's a sick satisfaction, a sick and strange source of happiness. Will is a whore and doesn't really know what else to be. Being a whore is comforting. It's something he knows, something he controls, something he *chooses*.

His friends know of course but they don't say anything, never comment on it. They don't really want it to be real. It's gross and demeaning and Will is the only damaged lost soul among them.

Mike tries to tell him once. He probably wants to help but he yells at Will, asks him why he does that to himself and Will feels so sad at seeing Mike's disgust that he lets a guy fill him up with piss and it's good too. A filthy kind of good.

He still has nightmares, still fears the dark. He never calls Mike, never bothers anyone. He sneaks out of his window, crashes a party and lets a few seniors fill him up until the monsters in his head fade, replaced by the raw pain, by the raw feeling of having five different cocks being shoved into him without care, choking him until he vomits and doesn't feel his body anymore. He likes the pain better than the darkness. It's something he chooses.

The first time he does it for money, it's because he needs cash for art supplies and doesn't have enough to pay. It's really easy money - five bucks just to get down on his knees - and he buys very nice stuff with it. In a week, he earns what his friends take almost a month to make. He saves all the money in a jar for College, to help his mom for his studies. She's done enough already and he's tired of being a burden. He's not even sure he'll go to College, not even sure he'll live through another year. He doesn't make them all pay however. It's only after

school or when he needs the cash. Most of the time, he just does it to help. Sometimes the guys are rough and really hurt him. Sometimes they're nice and take the time to prepare him. Sometimes, there's both in one party, the gentleness coming from the most unexpected person.

He hesitates before letting himself be dragged by James who's completely drunk and says his boys would use some fun, that all the girls were cock-blockers and all refused to play.

There's six of them. All drunk. Will is drunk too and a bit high. They fuck him until he thinks his throat and intestines are going to burst, deep and rough. No one wears condoms so they all cum in him, his body rejecting the fluid he can't keep. They make him keep it until his belly swells. One asks if a fag can get pregnant and they laugh, trying to get the fag pregnant. He lets them. He feels like floating. It's good and excruciating at the same time. But he's broken and the Mind Flayer calls to him again. The Mind Flayer always call to him. He answers, tears springing from his eyes on their own accord, his body giving up and he falls on the ground, riding off the pain. He thinks of Mike, of his beautiful smiles and beautiful eyes that no longer shine for him and he wonders if he'd hurt as good if Mike were moving inside him. If that'd make him feel as tainted.

He's almost passed out when a hand lands on his cheek, warm and soft. He blinks, looks up and sees Troy Harrington looking at him. His expression is blank, almost cold and disdainful but Will squints his eyes and looks further. And it's probably because he's drunk, high and broken that he sees a faint glimmer of sadness in those dark eyes and the nostrils flare as if to keep a Poker face.

He hears the other guys cheer. James asks him if he wants to play with the fag too. Troy pouts and grimaces in disgust, gagging and declining the offer, his voice cold as ice. Will looks down, feeling sick, on the verge of throwing up, the salty, bitter taste of the semen mingling with the alcohol and weed. He gasps, his body shaking. He hears steps hurrying out of the room and he's left alone with Harrington.

Troy is probably going to spit on him or hit him but Will doesn't care.

He tries to swallow, his throat burning and aching horribly, as if being filled with thorns. He wants to go home and curl in his bed, warm and safe. He doesn't regret doing it, however and would probably do it again if his body could endure more. But he reached his limit for the night. A towel touches his face. He looks up. Troy is wiping the semen off his cheek and lip with that same half cold, half strangely pained expression. The gesture is oddly gentle and sweet and he shudders. Troy stares right into him with a frown, removes a damp bang of hair from his other cheek, making him jump in fright. Will straightens up, winces and Troy's frown deepens.

"Why do you do that?" he asks before leaving him alone with the towel.

He looks at Mike from afar, so beautiful, and his heart painfully swells. He blinks and stares away, his eyes falling on Troy who's looking right at him, munching on his bread absentmindedly.

The first time Troy comes to him for help, Will is afraid Troy's going to hurt him on purpose. Troy doesn't seem very confident. He asks Will how much he takes and Will shrugs, says it depends on what he wants and how he wants to do it. Troy fucks him for twenty bucks. Will expects pain and humiliation. There's none. He's oddly gentle and careful, takes his time to prepare him, slides into him slowly and it's good. A nice kind of good. Troy's hands roam on his back and shoulders, soft, warm and comforting and it's an odd thought, so much gentleness coming from the boy who made his life living hell for so long. He comes in the condom, his lips brushing Will's shoulder, his breath dampening the skin.

Troy becomes a regular, one of those who systematically pays. They never talk or exchange anything else than the service Will provides. Troy is always gentle however, like he doesn't want to hurt him, and Will doesn't know why. Sometimes, Will feels so good, he comes. He rarely comes. So little that he wonders if he should just cut off his dick and saves himself the trouble. But Troy makes him come. He sinks into him, slow and careful, and Will's toes curl and Troy smiles, a soft, small smile, looking at him as Will rides his prostate orgasm off.

At school, they never talk or acknowledge the other's presence. Will

asks him once why he didn't fuck him that night. It's the first time they talk after sex and Troy is belting his jeans up. He arches his brow, looks at Will and shrugs. He doesn't answer, gives Will his fifty bucks and leaves, Will still naked on his bed.

Mike sees him blow a guy once and finally confronts him about it.

"He's not because you're gay that you have to put every dick you find in your mouth!"

Will swallows, not looking at Mike because Mike really is the only one Will would let do anything for free but he doesn't say it. Mike probably suspects Will likes him even though he never mentions it, not to embarrass Will or embarrass himself, Will doesn't know.

"I like it..." Will shrugs dismissively.

Mike frowns and gags, "You like having strangers' dicks shoved down your throat?"

Will nods, "Yeah, it's fun."

He thinks Mike is going to be sick or cry. Mike looks on the verge of both.

"Oh Will... What else do you do with those guys?"

"Everything, really. I don't have limits."

Mike's eyes are shining with unshed tears.

"Oh Will..."

"It's ok Mike. I'm fine. I really am."

Mike walks to him and puts his hands on his scrawny shoulders, burning him with his touch.

"No you're not. You need to stop considering yourself like a piece of meat and find a nice boyfriend who'll love you the way you deserve to be loved. Stop hurting yourself like that..."

Those words make Will cry. He doesn't deserve to be loved. He doesn't deserve much. Freaks like him don't. He just wants to feel alive, feel something, anything. He just wants Mike, wants to hold his hand and kiss him on the cheek while watching a movie. He wants Mike to be his boyfriend. But Mike will never be. Mike isn't like him. Mike wasn't chosen by the Demogorgon. Mike wasn't possessed by the Mind Flayer.

Mike isn't cursed.

One time, it goes really, really rough with a guy. He's not prepared and the guy doesn't use any lube. He tears. It's the first time he tears and the pain that explodes in his backside pushes him to the skies. Too raw and too intense.

He doesn't really know why, but he doesn't go home afterwards. He doesn't go to Mike either. He goes to Troy, not really realising it until he looks up and sees the house. Troy will probably send him packing but he climbs the gutter to his bedroom and knocks on his window.

Troy frowns when he sees him.

"Will?" It's the first time he says his name and it makes him feel odd inside, connected somehow. He touches his cheek. "What happened?"

He doesn't answer, lets Troy undress him, clean the blood from his thighs, lets himself be rolled on his stomach on Troy's bed, his bare bruised buttocks raised as Troy assesses the damages. It's oddly arousing and Will feels hot all over.

He feels Troy's finger touch him tentatively, brushing against the wound and Will gasps. It stings. It stings good. Troy stops and Will arches his back, giving him more access. Troy gets the message and touches him again, more insistently this time and Will moans. The finger dips inside slowly, pushing against the wound, just where it's the most sensitive, making Will sigh and see red stars. Troy presses two fingers into into, rubbing it slowly.

"Feels good?" he asks. Will nods and Troy chuckles, "You're such a pain slut."

Will doesn't say anything. He is a pain slut. There's no point denying it.

Troy removes his fingers and Will waits impatiently. He's horribly aroused, probably more than he's ever been. He knows it's not normal to be aroused when your body's in shambles, torn and bleeding. It's not normal to crave pain so much, to find it more satisfactory than regular pleasure but he doesn't care. He just needs it, needs the monsters in his head to stop screaming.

Something touches him again, soft and moist, and it takes Will a moment to realize it's Troy's tongue, slithering inside him like a snake. He whimpers. The tongue pushes against the tearing, slits right into it and Will feels all his nerves being set ablaze. Pain should never feel this good. Troy's tongue moves up and down, hardening the tip to push deep into the tearing. Will moans and whimpers uncontrollably and Troy licks more, almost devouring him, biting into him. He knows he's bleeding. He can feel it run on his legs. Warm and sticky. His breath catches in his throat. Sweat gathers on his brow.

"Please...", he begins in a shaky voice, "Please Troy... Fuck me please..." He feels Troy swallows against him, freezing, "Please... please..."

He needs it more than he ever needed it. His brain is buzzing with want. There's no need to use lube. The blood will do. It always does. Troy pushes into him, thick and hard, and Will's body gives. It's overwhelming.

"Do you like it?" Troy snarls in his ear, sliding in and out of him slowly, scrapping the wound with each thrust, widening it.

"Yes..." Will breathes, completely lost to the delicious pain that rolls through him in waves.

"Would you let Wheeler do this to you?" Troy asks and the pleasure mingles with heartbreak, "Would you like it if he did? If he tore you open like this? If he destroyed you?"

Will can't breathe. No, he wouldn't like it. He would hate it. He would

hate having sex with Mike, hate tainting his love for him with something as disgusting and degrading as ass fucking, would hate to be Mike's whore. His love for Mike is pure, virginal. It's the last beautiful thing about him. If Mike treated him like that, it would break him.

Troy pounds into him more harshly, making Will gasps in a sudden surge of unexpected pain.

"Would you?" he asks again, his voice nothing but a hateful snarl.

"No..."

"Why not?"

"Because I love him," he confesses in a soft cry.

Troy takes a sharp intake and gives a brutal thrust that shakes Will's body to the core, the pain resonating through and it feels as though this penis is gonna burst. He's roughly pushed on his back, his leg shoved over Troy's shoulder and Troy begins to fuck him deep and hard, like he's never fucked him before, like Troy Harrington should be fucking him everytime, bestial and full of rage.

He's forgotten how to breath, forgotten what he should be feeling. It's all at once. The Mind Flayer tries to scream in his head but he can't hear it, the darkness replaced by raw skinning.

Troy puts his hand on his face. It's covered in blood. There's blood on his lips too. Will blinks through the fog, fascinated. It's beautiful, red and pure. Clean. He's always liked his blood. It's the only thing he likes about him, the only thing that is pretty. He parts his lips and Troy strokes them with red fingers. The strong, metallic smell makes him dizzy, almost comforted. He licks the knuckle slowly, letting the taste sink in. Troy's hand slips down to his throat, encircles it, pressing. Will gasps and tries to choke. He feels weak and powerless, like a cornered prey. That's all he's ever been. It's exhilarating.

"You'd let me do it, wouldn't you?" Troy whispers, "You'd let me kill you."

Will has trouble thinking. He's lost, drowning in a black ocean. Yes,

he would. He'd let Troy do anything. It'd probably be for the best. He was supposed to die years ago. He's already a bit dead, parts of him stuck forever on the rotted snow.

Troy's hand tightens his grip around his neck, his thrusts more impatient. There's despair in his eyes. He's haunted too.

"You whore..." Troy spits.

His hand shuffles up to Will's face, resting on his cheek. He slaps him hard and tiny lights flash before Will's eyes. He blinks, his head pounding with pain. He's gonna vomit. A mouth suddenly crashes on his. Troy is kissing him. Troy has never kissed him before. No one has and Will's eyes shot open in shock. The kiss is harsh and demanding, desperate. Troy's hands latch on his shoulders like claws, his hips moving against his, thrusting urgently into him. Will opens his eyes. Troy is staring at him, their noses touching. It looks like he's crying. He comes in a succession of shudders. His seed burns through Will's ripped hole. The burning sets him off. He follows Troy down the pit and it's so powerful, his heart is almost seized up.

They're silent. Troy pulls away. Will catches his breath. He tries to sit. His body doesn't cooperate. He's drunk on pain, high on it, his brain a buzzing mess.

"So," Troy starts and Will can only hear him, "How much should I pay for what we've just done? How much is destroying your body worth you think?"

He slowly descends back, tries to sit again and gasps. The pleasure pain has receded to painful pain only. The waves have all crashed on the shore and Will is dry and pulsing, like a starfish coming to die on the sand. Troy leaves the room. Will doesn't move. He can't. His body is paralyzed by pain. He hears him shuffle away, looking for something. He comes back with a wet towel, a basin and soap that he puts on the side.

"Turn around," he says.

Will chuckles, "Already up for round two?" he flips on his stomach, wincing loudly, "I might need a moment if you don't mind... I won't

charge for it!”

Troy doesn't answer. He grabs Will by the hips and pulls him on his knees on the bed. His cheeks part and Will grunts at the bolt of burning pain that flashes through him. He takes a deep breath. Troy begins to clean him gently, almost apologetic.

“You need to go to the hospital.”

“No.”

“Seriously Byers, your ass is ruined. You need stitches. It won't heal on its own.”

“I'm not going to the damn hospital. I can't pay for it anyway.”

“Money's not a problem. You need a doctor. It could get infected.”

“I don't care.”

“Jesus fuck Will, what is wrong with you?! Why did you let me do that? Why do you let those guys do that?”

Will shrugs, ignoring the vicious pain striding him through as Troy passes the wet towel on the fresh wound, rinsing it repeatedly into the basin.

“You don't even need the money,” Troy says again, “I mean, I know you're not rolling in dough but you don't need to sell your ass to survive either. I know you mostly do it for free. So why?”

“You know I let guys fuck me for free and you always choose to pay. Why?”

“It makes it easier...”

Will frowns, hugging the pillow on which he's resting, “Easier to what?”

Troy ignores him, “Why do you do it?” he insists.

“I don't know... I like it. It's fun I guess...”

“Fun to have your anus ripped open by strangers?”

Will shrugs, “It’s an activity like any other... And at least I make it lucrative.”

“Yeah... It’s not exactly healthy.”

Will wants to reply that he got lost into another dimension for a week and possessed by a giant invisible monster for another and has had nightmares about it ever since. He doesn’t exactly define healthy.

“What about you? Why do you fuck me?” Will challenges. Troy stills, the towel pressed against his dripping wet ass, “You’re popular and kind of good looking. I’m sure you wouldn’t have a problem finding yourself a girl. One who could even do anal, if that’s the thing you like. Some girls like that.”

“Why are you making it so gross?” Troy breathes, almost inaudibly.

Will chuckles, “You cum in my ass twice a week and now you find it gross. Talk about hypocrite!”

“It’s not like that...” Troy argues feebly.

“Yes it is! That’s technically what we do! That’s what sodomy is about dude!”

Troy sighs, “No it’s not... It’s just the only way...”

“You never ask me to suck your dick. You only want to fuck me. So you like that. That’s your thing. You don’t have to deny it, you know. Everybody’s got their kink. I mean, I’m a whore and a pain slut. I like being mounted and filled by every guy I meet and the more, the merrier. So who am I to judge if you like shoving your dick in asses?”

“Could you please just stop talking? Please?”

Will arches his brow. It’s the first time they have talked that much and it’s weird. Troy is weird. He really doesn’t understand him. It’s probably why they never talk.

He stays. Troy’s parents are away and Troy insists he doesn’t go

anywhere, says he's hurt and needs to rest. The sheets are covered in blood. It's sick-looking and oddly comforting at the same time. Troy feeds him pasta and lets him sleep in his bed while he settles on the couch nearby. It's weird but Will is exhausted and broken and the bed is warm and soft and smells a bit like home.

It takes three weeks to heal and he hurts like a bitch for almost two, barely eating to avoid the toilet Hell. He takes a break from guys during that time, looking at Mike and it hurts even more than having his ass ripped open. Mike asks him what is wrong a few times, noticing how sensitive Will is when walking or sitting. Will doesn't say anything but he knows his friends have figured it out. He thinks of Troy's words as he watches Mike kiss a girl and his hands itch with the vibrant need to touch him. If only once. He meets Troy's eyes across the cafeteria. Troy is frowning. Will shrugs. Troy shakes his head, almost sadly and looks away, chatting back with his friends.

When Will promises Mike he's coming to his seventeen year-old birthday party Mike hugs him tightly, overjoyed, and Will's body jolts upward. He has forgotten how it felt to be in Mike's arms, how wonderful he smells, how wonderful he feels. He closes his eyes and lets himself sink into the embrace. It's warm and safe. It's Mike and Mike is a bit like a piece of heaven. He breathes in and for a second he pretends that he's worthy of Mike and that Mike loves him back. Just a second of stolen happiness. Mike knows the embrace is too affectionate, that Will stays in his arms much longer than any boy should stay in their best friend's arms but he doesn't say anything. He lets Will rest against his shoulder, lets Will have this small moment and Will still loves him with all the pieces of his broken heart. There's a faint apologetic sadness in the way Mike presses his hand against Will's nape.

It's late when everybody leaves and only Mike and Will remain in the basement. Mike is completely wasted. Will is no better. They pass the joint between their hands. They're so close, their shoulders are touching and Mike's warmth soaks him through.

Mike turns to look at Will and Will frowns.

"What?"

Mike takes a drag from the joint, "Nothing. It's just... I can't believe you do all those things... I mean, I met you, you were cute and tiny... Not that you're not cute now. You still are but it's different. It's just too bad you're a dude."

Will's brow shoots open, "Would have I had a chance if I'd been a girl?!"

Mike nods, "You're cute. It's just too bad you got a dick."

"You don't have to pay attention to it," Will rushes to say, "You can ignore it. I could be a girl for you."

Mike shakes his head, "No... I don't like anal. That's gross. I don't fuck poop doors. I like pussy."

Will shrugs, taking the joint, "A hole's a hole..."

Mike looks at him curiously, "Is this how you see yourself? A hole?"

"None of the guys ever complained..."

Mike chuckles, "You really are a strumpet, aren't you?"

"A strumpet?" Will smiles giving the joint back to Mike, "I like to put my body to good use and help my fellow men!"

Mike put the joint between his lips, "You really make them pay, don't you?"

"Not always... Only when I feel like it..."

"How much do you take?"

"Depends..." he turns to look at him, playful, "Why? Are you interested? For you, I'll do it for free."

"Have you ever done it out of love?" Mike suddenly asks.

Will shrugs, "Don't see the point..."

Mike doesn't say anything. He looks at Will with a strange expression, half curious, half predatory. Will is about to ask him what

is wrong when Mike dives forward and kisses him. Will yelps, his heart dancing in his chest. Mike is kissing him. It's finally happening. They make out for long minutes and Will is in paradise. Mike tastes of vodka and orange juice. His hand flies timidly to his cheek, cupping it tenderly. Mike doesn't push him away. He wants to touch him, wants to make him happy, wants to help him.

"Let me make you feel good," he whispers against Mike's lovely lips.

"Will..."

"You won't have to touch me, I swear. I'm keeping my clothes. You won't feel me at all. It won't be different than a girl, I promise. It might just be better."

Mike is too drunk and too gone to find a proper answer. He lets Will slide down on his knees in front of him. His hands are trembling as he unbuckles Mike's jeans. He looks up at Mike who looks suddenly terrified.

"Close your eyes," he says, "Forget I'm here."

He kisses Mike's lips again, softly, chastely. Mike moans. He's hard on his palm. Not hard for him. Just hard. But it's a bit like being hard for him and it makes Will happy through the fog. Mike is a lot bigger than what he used to be when they fumbled as children. He's beautiful, even more so than Will thought. He saw glimpses of him in the changing rooms but never got to behold him up so close. He nuzzles him, kisses him, makes it as good as possible for him. *His Mike*. He's painfully hard in his jeans. Mike doesn't touch him. He doesn't even slip his hands through his hair and Will knows he won't get anything in return. Mike won't help him back. He doesn't need anything though. Sucking Mike's cock is like a Christmas gift. He wants to remember this moment forever. Mike's eyes are closed, focused, his lips parted. He's lovely. He comes in a faint whisper in Will's eager mouth and Will feels his heart burst with happiness.

Mike falls asleep next to him afterwards, barely acknowledging him. Will doesn't care. He only hopes Mike has enjoyed it, only hopes he made him feel good. He watches Mike sleep, brushes a strand of ebony hair from his lovely face, his own body aching for a touch he

won't have.

Have you ever done it out of love?

Will isn't stupid. He knew this wouldn't mean anything, knew they were drunk and out of control. It still stings when Mike rejects him the next day. Stings bad.

"Look Will," Mike begins, looking everywhere around Will and Will knows what's coming, "About what happened yesterday..."

"It's ok Mike, we don't have to talk about it."

"No we do. I mean, I feel terrible. I was so drunk. I don't know why I kissed you... I got curious I guess... And it was... nice... What happened... But it won't happen again. I'm not gay or anything. Not that it's wrong! But I'm just not. I'm not into guys. At all. I'm sorry. I love you. I love you so very much. But not like that. You deserve to find a guy who can love you like you should be loved but I can't be that guy. I'm sorry," Mike looks on the verge to cry, his brow furrowed in pity.

Will swallows. He knew this was coming. He fights back the tears and smiles instead.

"Hey, it's ok! I'm the one who proposed. You said it yourself, I'm a strumpet!" he laughs it off awkwardly.

Mike looks down, mortified, "Oh Will... I'm so sorry... I'm a jerk... You're not. You're beautiful and kind and I wish I could be gay for you, wish I could be the Mike you'd want me to be."

Will flinches. Mike knows.

"It's ok Will," Mike says with a sad smile, "I'm not mad. I've always known. I'm sorry I can't reciprocate."

Will needs to get away, needs to flee. He can't bear any more pity in those dark, hypnotic eyes.

"I should go."

Mike makes an attempt at catching his wrist, "Will please..."

Will brushes him off, "Don't... I feel stupid enough as it is. Don't make it worse."

"Please Will, don't do anything rash."

"Don't be a strumpet you mean?!"

"Please..."

Will doesn't listen. He walks away, his crushed heart beating in his ears. A guy offers him a ride and he replaces Mike's taste with another for ten dollars. At least he hasn't burst in tears. Yet.

Troy finds him in Castle Byers. He's been hiding there for hours, lost to somber thoughts.

"How did you know I was there?"

Troy sits down next to him, "Your brother told me..."

"You went to my place?"

Troy shrugs, "I haven't heard from you in a while and I knew you were going to Wheeler's birthday so..."

Will arches his brow, "Were you worried about my well being?!"

"Shut up."

Will chuckles. They're silent for a little while, listening to the crickets around them.

"I sucked Mike's cock," he suddenly says, "He was drunk and he kissed me. So I jumped on the occasion and offered my services for free. I'm stupid like that."

Troy blinks, squinting his eyes, "What happened?"

"Oh nothing. The usual *I'm sorry but I'm not gay, I was drunk* speech. A classic."

Silence lingers for long seconds.

"I'm sorry Will..." Troy finally says, "He's a jerk."

"No, he's straight. I'm the one who shot myself in the foot with my proposal. Mike only kissed me. He didn't ask me to put his dick in my mouth. I did that on my own."

"You put everybody's dick in your mouth... No offense!"

"I never put yours! And Mike is special..."

Troy frowns as if battling a war of his own, "Did he reciprocate?"

"No! Of course not."

"Jerk..."

"No, straight! Why are you so upset he didn't suck me back? None of the guys I blow do. Mike isn't the only one. *I'm* the whore, remember?!"

Troy rolls his eyes and raises his arms above his head, "Stop doing that! Stop depreciating yourself like that! It's unnerving!"

"Says the guy who pays to cum in my ass!"

"It's completely different."

"Why is that?"

"Mostly because you don't want me like you want your Mike. It's business," he suddenly grows softer, "But if it weren't, I'd reciprocate."

"Yeah but that's because you're gay so it doesn't really count..." Will freezes. It's the first time ever he makes a direct allusion to Troy's unspoken sexuality, "I mean..."

"No you're right," Troy says with a frown, looking deadly serious, "I'm gay. I am."

Will swallows. He didn't expect Troy to admit it so easily. He thought

Troy would dismiss it or that he'd just be plainly wrong and that Troy only fucks him because he's bored and has too much money to spare.

"And you're wrong," Troy continues, "It would count. To me, it would."

Will's heart misses a beat. There's something solemn in the unsaid confession. He turns to Troy.

"Why?"

Troy turns to him. He doesn't answer. He just smiles, a small, sad smile and Will's heart clenches in his chest.

"Kiss me," Will whispers.

Troy blinks, lips parted in surprise. He licks his upper lip and slowly bends forward until their lips touch. It's soft and hesitant, like a first summer kiss. Will cups his face in his hands, Troy reaches for his neck and the kiss turns more heated. They rise on their knees, tasting each other, hungry and desperate and Will doesn't want to think of Mike anymore.

"Have you ever been touched before?" Troy asks softly.

Will frowns and chuckles, "I've been fucked by half the male population of town, you included..."

"That's not what I said. I didn't ask if you've been *fucked* before. I asked if you've ever been *touched*. If someone's already made you feel good."

To illustrate his words, he slides his hand down Will's hip onto his crotch and Will gasps. No, he's never been touched down there. Why would anyone bother? His reaction is all the answer Troy needed and the other boys' eyes are suddenly clouded with a veil of sadness.

"No, I haven't."

"Would you let me?" Troy whispers against his mouth, his breath tickling him. Will doesn't know what to answer. Troy kisses his

cheek, his brow, the tip of his nose, "I won't hurt you at all. Let me give you a little something." He pushes Will on his back gently, into the comforter that he uses as a handmade, leaving burning kisses all over his throat, unbuttoning his jeans with a controlled fervor. He palms him slowly, moaning a bit when he finds him hard, unbuttons his shirt one button after the other, revealing all of him in a way Troy never has before, "You're so lovely," he says, peppering kisses everywhere, "Wheeler is an idiot for not wanting you."

"It's not his fault."

"He's still an idiot."

Will has trouble breathing. Troy pulls off his boxers, frees him and gasps, biting his lips.

"You really don't have to do anything with it," Will says in haste.

Troy frowns, "You really hate it, don't you?"

Will shrugs, "It's just useless..."

Troy looks at him intently, as if trying to decipher, "It's not because Wheeler doesn't want to touch it that other boys won't. You're gorgeous. All of you."

Will swallows. Troy deciphered well. Mike hates it. He finds it disgusting. He finds all of Will's body disgusting. He didn't seem to have enjoyed the blowjob that much. Maybe Will was too drunk to make it good. It makes Will sad.

"Still," he says again, "You don't have to."

"I want to."

Will blinks and swallows. He has never been on the receiving end of pleasure before and he doesn't know how he's supposed to behave.

Troy smiles softly and kisses him, "It's ok. Relax. Let me take care of you."

He dives forward. It's the first time Will receives oral. The first time

he's touched like this. The first time someone wants to make him feel good. It's strange. Arousing and intimidating. A bit too intimate. He feels even more self-conscious, afraid he won't appreciate it as much as he should and disappoint Troy.

Troy isn't doing it just to do it. He looks at Will, sucks on him with shiny eyes and Will sees a mirror of himself looking at Mike, sucking on Mike. Adoration. Devotion. Pain of knowing they'll never look back at you the same. Troy's mouth feels good. It's soft and warm. He's not rolling off pain. There is no pain. Only a nice sucking sensation and warmth. He comes with a trepidation, gasping, eyes flashing white. His first purposely given orgasm. It's an odd thought.

"Are you ok?" Troy asks, shuffling over him to cuddle him gently, stroking his bare skin, "Did you like it?"

Will nods, "It was very nice, thank you," he says with a shy smile, "Was it ok for you too?"

"I loved it. I've wanted to do that for so long. I just didn't know if I could. If it was part of the deal."

"I can reciprocate if you want."

Troy shakes his head, "I'm good."

"Why don't you want me to do it? I'm good at it."

"I know. But if I have to come, I'd rather come in you. I love being inside you... It's like I'm a part of you or something. Like I'm sinking into you. And I like the way you look when I do it. You're just too cute. The little gasps and sighs, the little noises you make... It's adorable."

Will blinks. Troy's words hit him hard. He wants to say the words, wonders if Troy will say them but abstains. His tongue already felt like a silent confession, sweet and burning like love burns and conquers.

Troy no longer pays for their moments. Will doesn't want his money anymore. He doesn't anybody's money anymore, only the one he earns working at Walmart to pay for his studies. When guys beckon

him for a ride, he ignores them and keeps on the road. He hasn't heard the Mind Flayer in a while. Troy is leaving for College in September. He promises Will he'll call every week but Will doesn't believe him. He's not naive enough to think Troy won't find a better fish in the campus sea.

It feels different, the sex with Troy now that there's no deal. It's the same room, the same bed, the same dick, the same practice but Will is different. Troy is different. He kisses Will everywhere, makes him float, hands soft and dedicated. They smile and laugh and touch and for the first time Will thinks he understands what making love actually feels like.

He's still in love with Mike, still dreams of him. But the face that shines in his mind eye when he wakes in the morning looks more and more like Troy's. Maybe one day Mike's face will entirely fade... He still frowns when he sees him with a girl but looks across the room, falls on Troy smiling at him and his heart stops hurting.

He smiles back. Mike furrows his brow, looks in his direction and blinks. He doesn't understand why Will is smiling at Harrington. Nobody does.

Will doesn't care.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

"It's not a sexual love. It isn't physical. It consumes beyond the flesh and Mike burns in silence. He listens to Will' soft breathing against him, feels it damp his neck softly."

Notes for the Chapter:

So, it was just supposed to be a one shot and then... Well... Mike began to talk and stuff happened...

This chapter isn't as graphic as the first one but it's still very, very, very, very dark (you'll see what I mean... Yes, you will...).

If you want to read a happy little story, this ain't the one you're looking for.

Also, this chapter is long but I couldn't cut it or it wouldn't have been the same.

Hope it won't repel you from reading.

WARNING: sexual content, language, situations and so much more... \o/

Mike knows he doesn't know everything. He knows what Will lets them know. He isn't exactly sure what happens for real at first, what Will really does. He tries to suspect the least awful, tries not to suspect anything at all. He sees the way the guys in school look at him, half like a disgusting freak, half like a toy they can use. It's a strange combination. One he never thought he'd be a witness of.

They know the rumors, hear the guys call him a fairy and a whore. They don't pay attention to any of it. It's gross and demeaning and Will can't be broken to the point of sinking that low. They know Will hasn't forgotten, know he's still having nightmares, know he's not doing ok. He's having a crisis. They all are. That's what the age wants. It was a lot easier when their only concern was to pick up a bedtime story. Now it's a bit like hell, a life full of shit. It's supposed

to get better but Mike doesn't buy it. He's seen his parents, seen the adults around him. Tough and broken, walking through the wind, eyes closed and hands raised as shields. That's Will too. It's not just the nightmares or being seventeen. It's just Will being Will. Quiet, shy and scared, liking boys in a closet, never talking about it. They know of course and that's ok. Mike knows Will likes him a lot, more than a friend should like their friend and that's ok too. He also knows he'll never be able to like Will the same. He's not sure if that's ok or not. He just can't force himself. He tried. He likes pretty things after all and Will Byers is the prettiest of them all. It should be easy. It's not.

The first time he sees Will with a guy, he thinks his eyes and heart are going to pop out. On the parklot of Hawkins High, hidden behind an overflowing dumpster, Will is on his knees for a senior Mike doesn't know. He thinks he's Will's boyfriend at first but the guy doesn't behave like a lover. His hands are rough and his touch uncaring. He's fully clothed and looks down at Will like a cat looks at a mouse half eaten. He can't move, can't look away, eyes locked on Will's mouth focused on his disgusting task at hand. It's sickening, like watching an execution in slow motion. The guy doesn't use a condom. He comes in Will's mouth and Mike wants to vomit his lunch. He'll never have roasted chicken again. Will rises on his feet. He takes the dollar the guy is handing him, tucking it into his pocket, ignoring the way the other ruffles his hair mockingly. Mike can hear him call him a good slut. He blinks, not truly processing what he has just seen, until the images patch up together and he's left with no other choice but accept the sordid reality in which his lovely best friend sells his body for money.

He observes Will for a few days after that. His friend is calm and composed, detached and unaffected, sometimes breathing, sometimes wincing, faint marks adorning his skin and for the briefest of times, Mike sees a ghost looking back at him.

"I saw you with this guy!" he says once, Will drawing on his bed.

"Oh."

"I saw him give you money."

Will licks his lips but doesn't look up from his paper, "You saw the whole thing? Sorry for your eyes."

His voice is casual and devoid of emotions. They could have been talking about the weather.

"Why do you do that, Will?" Mike insists, desperate to stir some sort of reaction from his apathetic friend.

"I do guys in case you hadn't noticed!"

It's the first time Will admits it out loud.

"He's not because you're gay that you have to put every dick you find in your mouth!" Mike vividly counters.

"I like it..." Will shrugs dismissively.

"You like having strangers' dicks shoved down your throat?" Mike slowly repeats.

Will nods, "Yeah, it's fun."

Sweat gathers on Mike's brow. He can't believe what he's hearing. His stomach turns and he thinks he's going to be sick or burst in tears.

"Oh Will... What else do you do with those guys?"

"Everything, really. I don't have limits."

The words burn him and he suddenly thinks over all the times he saw Will wince when walking or sitting, his pretty delicate skin covered in bruises and his mind is invaded by hands gripping at him like claws and grimacing mouths spitting poisoned fire.

"Oh Will..."

"It's ok Mike. I'm fine. I really am."

Mike walks to him and puts his hands on his scrawny shoulders.

"No you're not. You need to stop considering yourself like a piece of

meat and find a nice boyfriend who'll love you the way you deserve to be loved. Stop hurting yourself like that... Have you ever done it out of love?"

Will doesn't say anything. He blinks and Mike has the answer he dreaded.

He watches Will from afar continue his little show, going and disappearing behind closed doors, emerging with red cheeks, red eyes and a new stain in the soul.

It breaks him to see his kind and gentle best friend give his precious body to strangers like a piece of meat, to imagine the horrible things they probably do to it when Will only deserves love and adoration, gentle hands warming his heart, sweet nothings whispered in his ear between two sighs. It's haunting him, the phantom laughter, the phantom pain. He doesn't know the frequency nor the depth of atrocities they commit but judging from the accumulated bucks in Will's special jar, he'd say often enough. He wants to make it stop but doesn't know how. Dustin closes his eyes when Mike tells him and lets him cry on his shoulder. There's nothing to be done really. He can't control it. It's not his life, it's not his body. He can only watch Will burn, perched on his altar of destruction, white and beautiful like a puppet without strings.

More than ever, he wishes he could show Will how beautiful he is, wishes he could love him like he deserves to be loved, worship him like he deserves to be worshiped. His heart wants him. His body doesn't. He loves him but won't get hard for him. He saw that first hand at his birthday party.

How dare he judge those guys when he's no different? He didn't ask Will anything and he still doesn't know what desperate folly possessed him that night but a part of him wanted to love Will, wanted to try. He only made it worse in the end and hurt Will all the more, used him and abused him, the memory of Will's mouth scorching him, eating him like the plague and he feels a bit hot and bit disgusted.

He sees them for the first time during the summer 1991. They are at the lake and Will is changing into his trucks, chest and back exposed. He recognizes them almost immediately, those dark red little dots that defile the purity of his skin.

“What’s that?” he asks, his heart beating in his ears.

Will shrugs, “I don't know. Allergy, I guess.”

“For how long have you had them?”

“A few days now I think.”

“You think? Please Will, go see a doctor.”

Will chuckles, “I’m fine, Mike.”

Mike stares at Will longer than ever, swallowing a thick lump of nervous fear.

“Are you careful? With those guys? Are you safe?”

“I’m fine. I know what I’m doing.”

“You need to stop doing that!”

“Need to stop being gay you mean?”

“Don’t play stupid with me! You know exactly what I mean. This isn’t a game! People are dying!”

Will snorts and rolls his eyes, “Yeah I know. God hates us.”

“Will...”

They don’t speak of it again but Mike doesn't forget. He can almost see it, that dark thick venom cursing through Will, poisoning him like a rotten seed planted in the roots of a tree. He tells them he’s positive in September. Mike isn't listening. His ears are ringing, as if his head were being fully emerged in ice cold water. His body is throbbing all over. His heart beats like it wants to explode.

Will looks unaffected, calm on his childhood bed. He mentions

experimental treatments that could buy him a bit of time. A bit of extra time with them. Because no matter what, he's dying. They all are but Will is dying faster.

They don't say much. They're stunned, hearts broken.

Mike becomes Will's shadow again. It's like the Mind Flayer, only worse. It's definitive this time. The finish line shines across the field and no supernatural drama will turn the tables. He follows Will around like a man possessed, never letting him out of his periphery as if he held the power to keep him here as long as he sees him.

They all learn the basics of hygiene around someone infected with AIDS, learn what they can and cannot do. Most of them are terrified. Lucas stays as far away from Will as possible. He doesn't want to die. Dustin and Max make an effort not to alienate him although Dustin looks completely panicked at first and Mike doesn't understand why. Joyce and Jonathan barely react. They've become so much used to Will being afflicted with every possible curse, nothing seems to reach them anymore. The doctors say Mike lacks self-preservation. They can go to Hell with their self-preservation bullshit. As long as Will is here with him, Mike is determined to make the most of it.

"Who was it?" he asks once in a voice that isn't his own. Will arches his brow inquisitively. Mike clarifies, "The guy who..." he swallows, "Was it... a client?" He chokes on the word. It makes his tongue thicker, as if covered in dirt.

"No. It was just a guy I met in a bar."

"How do you know it's him?"

"He's the only one who fucked me with a broken condom. I didn't react at first. I mean, I'm used to it and the guy looked clean. But when we were finished and he put his jeans back on... That's when I saw them... Red spots all over his hip."

Mike closes his eyes, tears stringing.

"I didn't think much of it then," Will continues, "I'd even forgotten. But when I started to get sick, it went back at me."

“And you didn’t do anything?!”

Will frowns and looks at Mike, annoyed and confused, “There was nothing to do Mike! Once it’s here, it’s here. It just doesn’t go away.”

“So you knew... When I mentioned those marks on your skin, you knew?”

Will shrugs, “No, not really. I hadn’t even vomited yet.”

Mike doesn’t speak for a long moment after that. He’s lost in thoughts, his mind a buzzing cacophony of incoherent phrases.

“Did you like him?” he suddenly asks, not looking up, “That guy, did you like him?” his voice breaks and he chokes on tears.

“It was a guy I met in a bar!” Will repeats slowly. “But yeah, the sex was alright if that’s what you mean.”

Mike wants to punch a wall with a surge of disgust, “No, that’s not what I meant. Did you have... I don’t know... Feelings for that guy?” Mike bounces on his feet, feverish, “Because if you had a semblance of affection for him, it makes you being contaminated less... unfair. Please, Will, tell me you’re not dying for nothing...”

Will doesn’t say anything. He walks slowly to Mike and gathers him in his arms, running soothing hands on his back as Mike cries his heart out. He clutches at Will’s body, unwilling to let go, unable to stop his flow of tears. He can’t help thinking that if he had been able to love Will entirely, Will wouldn’t be sick, Will wouldn’t be dying. Will would have been happy.

“Have you ever loved one of them?” he asks, watching Will draw at the hospital in November.

“You’re obsessed with my romantic life, Wheeler!”

“Have you?”

Will shrugs, “I’ve had nice moments.”

Mike isn’t satisfied. He needs to know that Will has been loved and

cherished, if only a little.

“You’ve never been in love? You’ve never had dreams with any of them?!”

“You were my dream!” Will says, batting his eyelashes and Mike feels his heart being crushed by an invisible hand.

Will senses Mike’s discomfort, “Hey, I’m joking Mike. Don’t get your straight panties up in a bunch! I was super infatuated with you for years but I made myself a reason. I’m good now and in a few months, you’ll be free of queer me for real! No more embarrassing gay best friend hopelessly pinning for you!”

He meant it as a dark joke but Mike feels hot tears fall on his cheeks. Will is staring at him with his soft, kind eyes. He’s looking at Mike like he always does, as if Mike were some sort of treasure Will wants to cherish and protect forever and his heart breaks. Will’s love for him is so pure, so beautiful. No one has ever loved him like Will does, fierce and unconditional. He suddenly remembers the gentle passion with which Will touched him that one time he let Will go down on him. No one has ever touched him with that much adoration. It almost makes him sick to be loved so deeply. He certainly doesn’t deserve it.

“Don’t say stuff like that,” Mike croaks painfully.

Will sighs, “Stop crying honestly. I’ll have to recycle you into a water fountain.”

Mike chuckles in spite of himself and runs a hand through the soft auburn hair. Will blushes, looking away and he’s so cute, it brings a sad little smile on Mike’s lips. He suddenly dives forward and kisses him on the cheek. Will’s eyes open wide and he gives him a puzzled expression. Mike doesn’t say anything. He smirks and pokes his nose gently. He knows he shouldn’t behave like that, shouldn’t confuse Will with his ambiguous behavior but he can’t help it. Will is just too cute.

“There was a boy once,” Will suddenly confesses in a serious tone and Mike turns to look at him, “He was good to me. He was always

gentle and kind. He made me feel good. I cared about him.”

“What happened?”

“It didn't work out,” he smirks sadly, “I couldn't be saved.”

Mike frowns, “Who was it?”

“It's not important.”

“Did I know him?”

“No. No one did.”

Mike doesn't press on.

Will's physical state deteriorates fast. The dozens of different treatments he tries are not working. The virus is stronger. After all those years surviving, Will's body finally gives up. The doctors promise six months left, maybe more, maybe less.

Mike puts his studies on hold to spend all his time with Will, distancing himself from his girlfriend. Jezebel isn't jealous. She understands. He decides they go spend some time at his family's cabin by the lake. It isn't far and it's quiet and beautiful and perfect for Will. They have calm walks around the lake, enjoying the fresh air, talking, being just the two of them. The days Will feels good, they take their bikes and paddle, laughing, racing through the woods. When Will is cold, Mike gathers him in his arms, stroking his hair tenderly, letting Will rest in the crook of his neck against a tree or in the couch near the fireplace. Mike kisses his brow, keeps him warm and safe.

He cooks them healthy food although Will doesn't eat much these days, gives Will his everyday injections and helps him with his treatment. When Will is too weak to stand on his feet, he carries him to the bathroom, puts him on the toilet and keeps him still. Will feels awfully embarrassed at first but Mike doesn't care. He pets Will's hair and waits patiently. Sometimes, Will can wash himself, sometimes he needs Mike. He needs Mike more and more now and Mike rubs his

skinny body with soap and affection.

He can already see it, the growing shadow of death. It shows on Will's emaciated features, in his soft whimpers, in the way he dozes off or vomits his meals. His heart misses a beat and fear chokes him, turning days into starless nights. Mike often watches Will sleep, listens to his soft breath and gentle heartbeat, ignoring the voice that whispers in his ear it will soon be silent.

Will has been feeling good today. They had a nice picnic by the lake and went on a stroll in the surrounding woods, hand in hand. The first time Mike took Will's hand, he didn't even realize it. It was only after Will had stopped and frozen, looking at their joined hands shyly that Mike became aware of it. He smiled at Will and tightened his grip, walking. It became a habit, gentle and platonic. At least, it's platonic for Mike. For Will, he really doesn't know. It doesn't mind if it isn't.

He let Will take his bath alone for a change, enjoying the quiet with a book. He loves those moments. He feels at peace. A quick glance at the clock indicates that Will has been in his bath for a while now.

He frowns, "Will?"

His call remains unanswered. His frown deepens. Will never stays more than forty-five minutes and it's already been an hour. His heartbeat increases. Something is wrong, he can feel it. He drops the book on the couch and hurries to the bathroom. He knocks. He's already seen Will naked a few times but he still owes his friend the modesty and privacy he asks.

Will doesn't answer.

"Will?" he tries again, his voice quivering a little.

He pushes the door open and his heart jumps in the back of his throat. Will is unconscious in the tub, his face blue and body whiter than death, the foam of the bath long gone. He rushes to him, panicked-stricken.

"Will?"

The water of the bath is cold. Will wobbles in Mike's hands like a ragdoll. Mike feels his heart stop, his head spinning to the verge of nausea.

"WILL!" he yells, shaking him urgently, tears forming in the corners of his eyes, "WILL!"

Will flutters his eyes open and gasps, blinking confusedly, "Mike?"

Mike feels the air fill his lungs again and he breathes deeply, hugging the wet body against him, "I've got you," he helps Will's shivering form out of the tub and envelopes him in a warm towel, almost carrying him to the bed, "I've got you."

He gets Will onto the bed, still wrapped into the towel and begins to dry him hysterically.

"I'm fine, Mike."

"You were unconscious."

"I've had a moment but I'm good now, I swear."

"You were blue," he rubs Will's body all over more frantically.

"I'm alright," Will whined, "I fell asleep."

Mike doesn't respond and focuses on drying Will thoroughly to make sure he doesn't catch a cold. He stops abruptly, his eyes fixed on the sudden bulge protruding from the towel. Will looks away, extremely uncomfortable.

"Sorry... I'd forgotten it was there," he says, swallowing with shame.

Mike blinks, confused. It takes him a moment to process the fact that Will is hard.

"Ignore it Mike," Will tries again pitifully, "It'll go away, I promise. I'm really sorry."

Mike doesn't say anything. His eyes are glued on the bulge. Will is hard. Will is hard for him. Something deep within him stirs and his

heart swells with unexpected tenderness at this body that still has enough life in it to react to his touch, enough to want him and express it and he feels hot tears spring in his eyes.

“After all these years?”

“You were my dream,” Will croaks softly and Mike’s lungs are so full they burn.

He puts his hand on Will’s chest, feeling the warm skin pulse under his fingertips. His body is trembling, his breath rugged and shallow and his hand trails down with a nervous swallow. He doesn’t even know what he’s doing.

“Mike...” Will squeaked.

His fingers brushes the bulge, his eyes widening. He stills for a few seconds, hot and feverish. He looks up at Will who bites his lip in embarrassment.

“Mike... Let it go... It’ll go away... Just...”

He flinches and jumps upwards under Mike’s touch and Mike watches, fascinated, Will ride off a tiny wave of shy pleasure. His lips extend into a gentle smile. He looks lovely. He slowly removes the towel and stares down at the hard member resting on Will’s belly. A thousand unknown emotions rush inside his brain, forcing it into overdrive. He doesn't understand what’s happening. He’s never experienced anything like it before, this foreign need to touch and feel beyond simple desire, beyond all that is.

The skin is warm and soft under his finger and he hears Will whimper. He trails it from the tip to the base, relishing in the sensation. A part of him tries to remind him that he’s touching Will’s cock and that it’s gross. He doesn’t listen. It’s not even about touching cock or pussy. It’s just about Will and Will feels warm and soft and alive under his fingertips. It’s nice.

He looks up. Will is staring at him with shining eyes, fighting the pleasure that threaten to swirl into his heart. Mike smiles at him tenderly.

"It's ok, Will," he whispers a few inches from his cracked lips, "I want to make you feel good."

"You don't have to," Will breathes shyly.

He brushes the tip with his thumb, earning a soft gasp from Will that brings a smile to his lips.

"I want to."

"I-it's n-not s-safe," Will stutters, "Use a condom, please. I don't wanna contaminate you."

Mike shakes his head, "I want to feel you. My hands are clean. No open wounds, no contact with fluids, I'm safe. I know what I'm doing Will. Let it go. It's ok. More than ok."

His hand begins to move in a familiar motion and Will has trouble breathing. Mike focuses on all the sensations crashing inside him, Will's eyes fluttering in pleasure, the feel of him against his palm, of his heart beating in his lips.

"Does it feel good, sweetheart?"

Will nods, rosy cheeks and mouth half open, letting out shallow gasps, eyes closed.

"You are so beautiful. I love you so much."

Will whimpers, a tear rolling on his cheek. Mike lies next to him to watch him more closely. Will smells like soap. He smiles, leans forward to kiss his cheek, stroking him steadily, setting a pace that Will seems to like. He memorizes every single detail on Will's face, from his cute little nose to the crinkles in his eyes and thin layer of saliva on his bottom lip. Will's heart beats faster, his brow furrows, his legs shake. Mike swallows, his own breathing suddenly more laborious as he shares Will's pleasure in a way he never has before. His eyes widen and he watches Will come a few inches from his own face, arching a little from the bed, shooting his seed on his stomach and Will looks so lovely, it makes Mike want to cry. Will slowly descends back into the real world, his eyes fluttering open to look at Mike timidly.

“Thank you,” he whispers in a small voice.

Mike smiles, “Your welcome, precious! Was it good? I’d never done that before!”

Will nods slowly and Mike grins at him, happy. He grabs a tissue to clean the semen off Will’s stomach and kisses his brow before nuzzling him into a cuddle on the bed.

“If I had known what it’d take to get you in my pants I would’ve contaminated myself a lot sooner!” Will jokes but Mike doesn’t find it funny.

“Will...”

Will grins and chuckles. He suddenly grows somber, almost worried.

“I hope it didn’t... you know... gross you out or something...”

Mike kisses his bony shoulder and frowns, “What?”

“Jerking me off...”

Mike looks at him intently, “You’re my Will. Nothing about you could ever disgust me.”

“We’ll talk about that in a few months when I start wearing diapers.”

“And I’ll powder your bum with all my love and affection.”

“Gross.”

“See, you’re the one being disgusted. Not me.”

They chuckle and fall asleep tangled in each other and it’s ironic really to think that although Mike wasn’t Will’s first lover as Will always wanted, he’ll be his last.

Spring is nearing and flowers are timidly making their way back into the trees. They had a beautiful day and spent all the afternoon outside. They’re on the patio, watching the sunset with a drink. They

know Will isn't technically allowed to drink alcohol but Will doesn't care. He says that he's dying anyway so why bother!

Mike looks at him, leaned against the wall, a glass of whiskey on his lips.

He frowns, "How much did you take?" he asks.

Will arches his brow, "You really want to know that!" he says with a smile.

Mike shrugs. Yes, he really wants to know. He's both horrified and fascinated by Will's past as a prostitute. There really isn't anything fascinating about getting fucked for money, Mike reckons, but it makes Will an experienced man somehow - a professional - and this reaches Mike deep within. He finds it gross and hot at the same time.

Will walks to him as feline as his weakened frame allows it.

"It depends on what I did."

"And what did you do?"

"I told you. Everything."

"What's everything?!"

Will smirks, "It's everything."

"No limits?"

"No limits. Except pussy. That's my limit. Even for a million dollars I wouldn't do pussy. Pussy's gross as fuck."

Mike chuckles, "What's the worst you did?" he says more seriously.

"Define worst?"

"The one thing that got to you the most."

"Good or bad?"

"If it's the worst, then it's bad."

Will smiles enigmatically, “Not necessarily.”

Mike swallows. This conversation is surreal. He knows he’ll regret it.

“So?” he asks again, “What’s the worst?”

“Why do you want to know?”

“I need to.”

“You’re gonna hurt yourself, Mike. Don’t go there.”

Mike locks eyes with his, “Maybe. What’s the worst?”

Will swallows. He sits on the stairs. Mike joins him.

“Every time I got fucked was a little bit of it. It’s not just about the pain. It’s the desecration, the separation between your body and yourself, feeling things you can’t control. It sticks to you, gets under your skin and the dirtier you feel, the more you want to do it again. I think, that’s the worst actually, the addiction. The absolute impossibility to stop because you need to feel it over and over again. This dark, morbid satisfaction. It’s like a drug. It’s scary and it never goes away. That’s the worst.”

“Even now?”

“Yeah... I still have the stir, the urge to do something crazy and dangerous. It got me here, to my dying days.”

Mike is silent for a few seconds before talking again.

“You didn’t answer my question.”

“What question?”

“How much did you take?”

Will considers him with a side grin, taking a sip from his whiskey, “If we keep to the basics, then twenty for a blowjob and fifty for fucking, beautiful. But for you, I’ll always do it for free!”

Mike chuckles, sipping from his own glass, “Did you earn a lot?”

"In my best days, I could make up to two hundred bucks in a day, yeah."

It takes a few seconds to Mike to process the news.

"Did you ever do it with someone we know? Someone close?"

"Apart from you you mean?" Mike freezes. He suddenly hates the implication behind those words. He was afraid of it, afraid Will would consider what happened between them like turning a free trick, even if Will was the one who proposed. Will hurries to clarify himself, "I'm not saying that what happened was the same. I mean, I'm the one who offered. I really wanted it."

Mike swallows the bitter lump that has formed in his throat, "Apart from me, yeah," Will doesn't respond. He looks down, suddenly uncomfortable and Mike guesses the answer, "That means yes. Who was it?" he presses.

Will sighs, "A year ago, I went to this Freshman party in college. I got dragged by a few guys who wanted some fun and what best candidate than the fag whore for that..." he swallows, searching his words, "They were four," he pauses again, unsure, before taking a deep breath to give himself the courage to continue, "Dustin was part of the lot," Mike's eyes widen in horror, "He didn't know he'd be me. Didn't even know something like that would happen. They were drunk. He was mortified. He resisted at first, said he didn't want to do it, that he'd go home, that I was his friend and that he wouldn't do shit with his friend and a guy," Will licks his lips, "He was confused, lost. Scared. He wanted to be grossed out but he was aroused. I know those moments. It's typical. Happens all the time in groups. One of the guys asked me to be persuasive. I got persuasive. I know how. And it happened. He didn't fuck me! Don't worry. I just sucked his cock. It wasn't that bad. I made five hundred dollars that night. It paid my rent for two months."

Mike's tongue feels ticker in his mouth, dirty.

"He *paid* you?"

"Yep. Twenty bucks."

“You said you earned five hundred. They were four. So the guys didn’t just ask you for blowjobs...”

“The others? No! They were a little bit more creative than that! Double is more expensive!”

“Double?” Mike repeats, letting the words sink in, feeling sick when they do, “And Dustin stayed the whole time?!”

Will nods “He was stunned. Came twice just looking at me getting fucked by his friends. I think he couldn’t touch his girl for weeks after that. Couldn’t look at me in the eye either!” Mike doesn’t say anything. He’s shocked, horrified. Will is oblivious, “I didn’t mind doing it with Dustin. He’s good looking and he has a great cock!”

Mike chocks, “Thanks for the info!” Will grins at him, swings the small bottle of whiskey to his mouth, “How can you be so detached with all of this?”

Will shrugs, “They’re just cocks. Blowjobs and ass fucking are the basics of what I did, the cutest. You have no idea of all the bizarre things some guys asked me to do... Sex is weird, Mike. It calls to the darkest part inside all of us. It’s primal, dirty and sordid.”

Mike stares at him, his heart clenching in his chest, “Was it sordid, what happened between us?”

He fears the answer. Will turns to him, his expression softening.

“No. It was sweet. I liked it.”

Mike swallows timidly, “I liked it too,” he confesses and Will smiles softly.

He loves taking care of Will, loves cooking him his favorite food, loves bathing him, making him feel safe and happy. He has twelve pills to take every day and Mike makes sure he never forgets one. Will gulps them down one by one with a glass of water like an obedient little boy, saying it’s useless anyway.

His skin becomes awfully dry and he’s losing his hair. There’s nothing to be done for the hair loss but Mike can help with the dryness of the

skin.

Will chuckles when he sees him come back from his shopping spree with a bottle of moisturizer.

“What’s that for?”

“Your poor skin.”

Will looks at him, amused, “I’m not a doll you know!” Mike ignores him. He pours some of the lotion onto his hands and begins to rub Will’s arms and chest, “Be careful Mike! If you keep rubbing me like that, I’ll get hard again!” Will jokes.

Mike doesn’t look up, focused on his task at hand, “And I’ll jerk you off again!”

“Don’t play games with me, Wheeler!” Will’s voice is darker, almost a warning.

“I’m not playing. You’re cute when you cum.”

“I thought you didn’t like guys?!”

“I don’t. I like you. You’re my Will,” he looks up. Will is studying him, as if analyzing whether Mike is mocking him or not. Mike clarifies, “I’m not into guys. I like women. But you, it’s different. I don’t care you’re a guy. I love you too much for that. Sorry if I’m not making any sense.”

They are silent again. Mike rubs his skin until the lotion has been completely absorbed. Will is calm. He’s breathing deeply and Mike smirks. He looks down. Will is hard again, the bulge deforming his yoga pants. It makes Mike’s smirk widen mischievously.

“Enjoying yourself I see!” he gently mocks.

“Told you I would.”

Mike bends to whisper into Will’s ear, “Need help with that?!”

Will inhales sharply, “You don’t have to, Mike.”

“Oh but I want to.”

He touches the bulge, bites his lip and Will mews. He spreads Will's legs, settles between them, stroking Will above the thin material, sliding his other hand into his pants to reach the only available entrance into Will's body. Will gasps immediately and jolts away.

“Wow, wow, wow! What are you doing?”

“I want to touch you there if that's ok?”

Will looks at him with an odd expression, “You've had ten years to play gay discovery before I get sick but you decide you want to toy with my ass after I've been infected with the deadliest disease of all times? Do you have a fetish or something?”

Mike blinks, “I just want to touch you.”

“It's not a game, Mike. I'm dangerous. I offered you my services before. You declined. It's your call. Now it's too late, baby. I can't provide anymore. You've reached the expiration date.”

“You don't want me anymore?”

“I'll want you even when I'm a cold rotting piece of flesh buried in the earth.”

Mike's heart leaps painfully in his chest. A desperate fervor gathers in the deepest of him, “Then let me touch you!” he reaches for Will again who pushes him away.

“No, Mike! The risks of you being contaminated are too high.”

“It's only 2 percent. One in fifty times and that only counts for unprotected sex with direct contact with fluids.”

“I was one in fifty times,” Will grits between his teeth.

“Yes but it was unprotected with direct contact with fluids.”

“It was protected. The condom broke. One time is more than enough! It did the trick for me. Look at me now!”

Mike swallows, "Please Will, I need to do it. I've followed every session about the virus at the hospital. I know all about it. I know what I'm doing. Please. I really need this. Just once. I'll be careful, I promise."

"No Mike!"

"But Will..."

"I said no! I won't take any risk. You could be wrapped up in plastic bags from head to toe that I'd still wouldn't let anything happen."

"You let me touch you once," Mike points out.

"Yes and it was one time too much. It was reckless of me. It should have never happened."

"I help you poop and clean yourself everyday."

"There's a difference between assisting me with medical gloves and jerking me off without protection."

"I'll be wearing protection!"

"No!"

Mike is so frustrated, he wants to cry.

"Please Will. I need this. Let me make love to you."

Will swallows. His eyes are shining with unshed tears. He extends his hand to touch Mike's cheek, "I'd love nothing more than to let you have me the way you want. But we can't. Don't start singing me songs about data and protection. That's bullshit. I will not risk infecting you. Not ever. I'll go alone if you don't mind."

"What if I do?"

Will chuckles through his tears, "Then it's all the same."

Mike huffs, "You'd leave me all hard and frustrated?" he jokes in fake offense.

Will arches his brow, his lips extending in a grin. He lies next to Mike on the bed, supported on his elbow.

“Oh you poor man!” he brushes Mike’s erection through his jeans and Mike gasps. Will’s eyes have darkened, giving him an air of dominance and his dirty smirk goes directly into Mike’s groin, “Is this what you want?” he asks and his voice is but a whisper.

Mike gasps, “I want to be in you,” he says as Will presses his hand into him more insistently, losing his sanity to Will's touch.

“No,” Will answers, “This is all you’ll have. My body's off limits.”

“But I want you to feel good with me!” he whines, the physical frustration becoming unbearable.

Will is about to repeat his same old argument when Mike pushes him on the bed, desire burning him like lava.

“I want you,” he snarls.

“Mike...” Will warns but Mike isn’t listening.

He urgently grabs four medical gloves that he slides on his and Will’s hands, pull down both of their pants, takes Will’s hand to press it onto his crotch as he presses his onto Will's.

“Mike...” Will whispers, looking at Mike in silent awe.

“Stop talking. Come with me. We’re wearing the gloves. We’re safe.”

They begin to stroke each other, eyes locked, noses brushing. They want to kiss. Their lips are trembling, desperate for a feel of the other. They know they can’t. He watches Will take his pleasure in his arms, listens to the little noises he makes and his heart swells with affection. It’s not sexual arousal as he usually knows it. It’s something else, something more powerful, something beyond everything he has ever felt.

“I wish I could plunge into you,” he whispers hauntingly, his face burning with too many emotions, “Bury myself up to the hilt in you.”

He wants to sink into Will, merge with him, wants to clean his body from the inside, erase all invisible traces of evil stains.

“Mike...”

Mike grabs Will's head with his free hand, buries his fingers in his thinning hair.

“My beautiful, beautiful Cleric.”

He thinks of all those guys who were there before him and his heart bleeds. It's different this time, he hopes. It's he and Will, just the two of them on this bed, in this cabin, February 1992. They're floating on a strange cloud. Mike can feel himself slipping and he realizes that if he'd have to fall with Will, he wouldn't try to climb back up.

Will is getting worse. He barely leaves the bed anymore. Mike asks him if he wants to go back home. Will refuses, saying he'd rather stay here with Mike a little more. The few times he has enough energy to stand, Mike takes him to the lake and Will watches the sun set in his wheelchair. He never says the words but Mike knows Will wonders if he'll see the next one the next day. Mike wonders too. When it gets really bad and Will spends the days throwing up, Mike calls a doctor in emergency. He gives Will meds to calm the stomach cramps, tells Mike to be ready for the worse. Mike isn't. He calls Joyce and Jonathan. They're on the road to join them. So are the party members. Their honeymoon is over and so is Will's presence among them. It's just a matter of time, Mike knows it. Death is already here and Mike doesn't want to let him go. It makes him physically ill. He hates it when Will sleeps, hates the heavy breaths he takes, hates to see him in so much pain.

“I'm ok, Mike...”

“You're not...” he strokes Will's damp hair, “You're soaked in sweat.”

“Yeah, stop dipping your fingers in it.”

“Do you want me to draw you a bath?”

Will rolls his eyes, "I'm not a fucking mermaid. I don't need to be fully emerged in water all the fucking time!"

Mike bites his lip in spite of himself. Even dying, Will hasn't lost any of his fire repartee. He smiles, presses his forehead to Will's, touching his cheek gently. He stares into his eyes for long seconds before diving in and gently kissing his lips chastely. Will shakes under him.

"Mike, no!" he protests weakly.

"You'd be a lovely mermaid," he whispers, "Maybe you'll come back as one."

Will arches his brow, "Mermaids don't exist, Mike. At best, I'll come back as a fish and end up in a bowl."

Mike rolls his eyes, "If you come back as a fish, you'll be one of those colorful ones we see in the corals along the Pacific shores."

"I'll be a gay fish! Yoohoo!" Will jokes, full of sarcasm.

"You'll be the prettiest."

Will chuckles and Mike kisses his cheek. They can't even remember when they started talking so casually about Will's potential reincarnation, making his death an inevitable occurrence. Talking about death helps. It makes it less scary. It makes it a strange friend.

"No," Will says, "I want to come back as a bird," he takes on a dreamy expression as if already far away in distant worlds, "You know, one of those migratory birds that can fly high in the sky for hours, traveling all around the world. I want to fly over mountains and oceans. I want to brush alpine trees with my wings. I want to fly into the sun as he sets and rises. That'd be nice."

Mike listens to him with rapt attention, his eyes tearing up. He doesn't answer. He knows Will will take flight soon enough.

They bring him back home. It's his birthday. He's twenty-one. They want to make it a special day, instinctively knowing it's probably the

last time they'll celebrate it. Joyce made Will's favorite strawberry cake. Mike and the others have tried finding him the most appropriate gift. Will turns his situation to ridicule and asks for new diapers. They shrug, ignoring his antics. Dustin ruffles his hair. Mike growls. Ever since Will told him what happened, he can't bear looking at Dustin. He wants to punch him in the face. Dustin frowns, sends him a silent inquiry and Mike grimaces all the more. Dustin swallows. He's not stupid. He figured it out.

Will fakes disappointment when they won't get him that fancy coffin he saw in the store. His humor has become terrifyingly cynical and it's getting worse with each passing day. Death makes him laugh. He says they'll be living on the same plane soon enough, that they'll be buddies.

He gasps when he sees the giant frame they made of all the drawings he has ever made and given to them. It takes a full wall, every drawing patched up together in a colorful memento, their details and quality increasing with the years and Will's improved skills. He's so talented, it's crazy. It's a waste too. They have included pictures with the drawings to recreate the timeline of their friendship, from Kindergarten to Will's latest birthday. It's not all. They've all gotten the same tattoo in the inside of the wrist, listing every party member and their class.

The Paladin

The Bard

The Ranger

The zoomer

The mage

The Cleric

A permanent attachment, a promise. It makes Will cry. He's never said it but Mike knows he's afraid they'll forget him.

Will makes him swear once, "Please, Mike," he says, latched to his pillow, fighting a crisis, "Promise me you won't forget me."

Mike frowns, joins Will on the bed, rubs his back soothingly.

“Don’t say anything stupid! I’ll never forget you. You’ll be in my heart everyday. Stop talking as if you were already gone. You’re still here.”

Will doesn’t answer. He snuggles into Mike, crying, scared. He doesn’t want to go. Mike looks up and sees Joyce looking back at him from the threshold with a broken smile. She’s strong for her son but she’s going from the inside too. He kisses Will’s brow, rocks him until he’s calm and sleeping quietly in the crook of his neck.

He stays at home till the end of Spring. One of the treatment gives him some respite. Mike never leaves his side. He’s with him everyday, helping Joyce and Jonathan taking care of him. It’s not a great life. Will is dependent on Mike and his family for everything. He’s not in pain though. He doesn’t linger on it. Pain will come in due time. It always does. Mike cradles Will in his arms, plays the guitar for him, sleeps in his bed. He doesn’t remember when he’s taken the habit but it becomes his everyday routine, the Byers’ residence his new home. His parents don’t partake in everyone’s admiration of Mike’s dedication to his friend. They’re afraid for their son, think it’s unhealthy and dangerous to be so close to someone infected with that horrible gay cancer. They don’t want their son to become gay too, or perhaps get cancer. Mike isn’t too sure. Mike doesn’t care.

The first heat waves of June are too much for Will and he’s brought to the hospital in emergency. The treatment stopped working. They watch as the doctors tell Joyce the end is nearing. She burst in tears, Jonathan comforting her. Mike swallows. Will blinks on his hospital bed. He knows and looks down, accepting defeat silently.

The door creaks open. Mike turns and frowns, not understanding what Troy Harrington is doing here. He’s about to speak when he sees the complete devastation on his face and the way he and Will’s eyes lock in silent communication. Will seems just as confused as he is but it’s a different sort of confusion. He’s shocked to see him here, happy, relieved even. Mike remains silent, watching the exchange. Troy sits on the bed, taking Will’s bruised hand, hot tears falling on

his cheeks. That's when he understands, when he remembers. Troy is the boy who tried to save Will and judging from the way his hand is trembling on Will's, Mike realizes that he hasn't stopped trying.

He lets them, brings Will some tea. Troy leaves at the end of the day. He has a plane he can't miss. Mike watches him kiss Will goodbye on the lips. Will protests immediately but just like Mike, Troy doesn't care. He kisses him a second time, touches his bony cheek as if trying to catch some of its warmth within his palm and keep it. Mike wants to be jealous, wants to hate him. He can't. He sees in Troy's eyes that same glimmer of delusional hope, that same mirror of pain. Against all odds, they share a common scourge. They love someone who cannot stay.

The hospital bed is small but Mike makes himself fit in it, stroking Will's hair softly, staring at him.

"Thank you, Mike," Will says.

"For what?"

"For being my friend. For staying with me. These months with you were the happiest of my life," he extends his hand to touch his brow. It takes a lot of his energy, "You're so beautiful. I've always loved watching you," he swallows, smiles a little, "I love you Mike," his voice is gentle, tired as he says those words out loud for the first time and something inside Mike breaks, "I always have. You've always been such a great friend. It was difficult not to! You always stayed by my side and supported me. Thank you for everything."

Mike swallows. He doesn't like where the conversation is heading. It sounds like a goodbye.

"Will..."

"Do you think we could have been happy together?" Will suddenly asks.

Tears form in Mike's eyes as he imagines a reality in which they're happy. He imagines Will as a renowned painter, wearing white suits, smirking and full of life. They'd be living in a nice little house and

Mike would cook pies. A little girl comes rushing with a drawing, bouncing happily all over and he watches Will make her swirl, laughing.

“Yes, I think we could have,” he whispers, seeing himself kiss Will in this strange, distant reality.

Will chuckles before getting serious again, “You know Mike, life doesn't make us happy. We are the only ones responsible for our own happiness. Promise me you'll live the life you want, the life that'll make you happy.”

Mike snuffles, “I promise.”

Will smiles through exhausted eyes. He touches Mike's cheek, pets his hair.

“It's soft...” he whispers.

Mike furrows his brow, looking down at Will.

“What?”

“Your hair. I've always wondered if it was as soft as it looked,” he explains slowly, “It is.”

He doesn't say more, snuggles into Mike, his nose in the crook of his neck, humming happily. Mike embraces him, strokes his hair tenderly, kisses his brow.

“I love you Will,” he says.

And he really does. It's not a sexual love. It isn't physical. It consumes beyond the flesh and Mike burns in silence. He listens to Will' soft breathing against him, feels it damp his neck softly.

“I can hear your heartbeat,” Will whispers.

Mike smiles. Will doesn't add anything. He falls asleep, cradled in Mike's arms. Mike follows, dozing off against Will's head. Time stops and everything stills. A sudden surge of adrenaline wakes him up abruptly and he bolts upward on the mattress. He looks down at Will.

Will isn't moving. He looks calm and appeased. Mike tries to swallow the lump in his throat.

“Will?” he calls tentatively.

Will doesn't answer. He doesn't wake up. He won't wake up again.

Notes for the Chapter:

I didn't add the AIDS tag and I didn't mention it in the entry notes mostly because I didn't want to spoil the plot.

There will be a last installment with Mike dealing with the aftermath of Will's death.

It will be dark.

Don't hesitate to let me know what you thought of it, even if it's not a happy story...

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

"He remembers his soft smile, the twinkle in his green eyes. His laugh. The way he would move his hand whenever he won at game night or was just happy about something. He remembers the face he pulled when his mother insisted he had broccoli. How he wrinkled his nose when focused on a drawing. Everything about Will was endearing. Everything about Will is gone."

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey guys! First of all, I really wanted to thank you all for your amazing support. This means a lot to me! So thank you, thank you, thank you!

I hope you'll like this new installment. It wasn't supposed to be the last but there were so many pages to it, I had to stop writing the part and divide it.

WARNING: as usual, extremely disturbing content involving language, situations, REALISTIC depiction of death and mourning, self-harm, self-destruction, mental instability, heavily graphical sexual display between boys.

It's still very, very dark.

Have fun :p

He doesn't know for how long he's been here, in this cold, freezing Morgue, staring down at Will's white body. When he realized Will was gone, he didn't react right away, only hugged him tightly, keeping him warm with him for as long as he could, ignoring the nurses, Joyce and all the people around who wanted to pull him away from the bed. They said they needed to clean him. It made

Mike laugh dry. Mike could have done it himself. He knows how. For months he washed and pampered Will like a devoted mother. The idea of strangers touching Will makes him ill. Strangers have touched his body too often, tainted him with their filth. Mike couldn't bear to let it be desecrated again.

They refused to let him do it, called him a hysteric, threw him out of the room and Mike sobbed and screamed at the door in vain.

And now he's here, in this joke of a Morgue watching his unmoving best friend on that metallic table. AIDS casualties are considered infectious even when dead. Will isn't even allowed a proper Morgue, only this joke of a place for people like him. They didn't want Mike to go near him either but Mike didn't care. Made him wear gloves and a special suit to avoid contact. They're more afraid of Will now that he's dead, as if Will were going to disintegrate in thin air and contaminate all in the vicinity.

It doesn't work like that. Will isn't contagious anymore. Will is just dead. He lays on that cold table, his body covered in a sheet as white as the rest of him. Mike has removed his gloves and that stupid suit. He's stroking Will's forehead softly. The skin is freezing, as hard as wood. It's odd, doesn't feel like Will, feels more like a doll made after Will. A discarded puppet in a box. He sniffles, stares at him, not really remembering what he's doing here and why they've been stocking Will in a fridge. Will hates the cold and Mike can't make him warm again. The more he's hugging him, the colder they both get.

The door opens on a gasp. Mike turns his head to see Troy in the doorway. He swallows, blinks, watches Troy swoop on Will, throwing his gloves and suit on the ground.

"Oh my baby," he cries, framing Will's forehead, "What have they done to you?"

He bends to kiss him a dozen times, cradles him. Mike cannot move. He wants to ask a million questions. Why is Troy here again? How did they happen? What were they even? Why? But he can't find the strength to speak. For long seconds, he silently observes Troy sob on Will like a wounded bird, soaking his face with his tears, stroking his dry hair, kissing his brow. Mike's hand moves to Will's hard cold

wrist. It doesn't even feel like human skin. If it weren't Will, it would be disgusting. It already is a little.

He spends so much time at the Morgue watching over Will he's forgotten the world is supposed to be warm around him. Touching Joyce's warm, pliant hand feels odd. He lives in the cold, in a fridge with his dead best friend he loves too much and loved too late. Even smells are different. Sickeningly sweet. Pungent. The smell of powder applied repeatedly on dead flesh, necrosing underneath. It's a smell he carries everywhere now. The smell of cold, perfumed death. Will's cheeks already have turned a bit green. It's very faint but Mike can see it day after day. Will is colder, harder, greener. It reminds Mike that he's not sleeping, that he's really dead. His lips and eyes have been glued shut. The makeup hides the scars caused by the virus and Mike admires Will's beauty again. Before he was sick. Joyce brought clothes for the funeral. A nice suit Will often wore during school dances. He's so skinny, he fits them effortlessly and lays on that cold table, in that suit, ready to be put away like an old toy in the attic.

He watches the morticians lift Will from the table. They have to be careful. Will's body has hardened so much, it'd break if they'd let it fall. It'd shatter to the ground. They slip him into the open casket, lay him on his last white satin bed, his hands crossed against his chest. Mike swallows. They're allowed a last goodbye before the coffin is sealed for good.

Joyce and Jonathan go first, supported by Jim and Jane. Joyce shakes and trembles in her husband's arms. Jane blinks and swallows, snuggles into Jonathan, watches inside the coffin with a vague expression.

Troy kisses Will's forehead goodbye, smiles at him, whispers words they can't hear.

Mike touches Will's hand, his laughing, breathing best friend's face briefly replacing the white, cold, doll-like one he's staring at now. He slips pictures and drawings into the coffin as well as a small pendant he offered Will one Christmas so that Will doesn't go down alone.

The sealing of the coffin is harder than Mike thought. He catches the very last glimpse of his face before the lid covers it. The very last

one. Each hit of the hammer on the screws feel like a stab inside his own heart.

“Have you ever wondered what sound we heard in outerspace?”

One hit.

“It’s the void, Will. There’s no sound.”

Another hit.

“What does the void sound like?”

Another.

“I don’t know. Silence isn’t supposed to sound like anything at all.”

Another.

The coffin is sealed, hiding Will from view for good. Keeping him trapped inside, sheltering him from the dirt that will swallow him. Mike wonders how long it will take for the wood to rot and worms feast on Will’s flesh. If he sits on the ground, will he touch a piece of Will then? The thought could have made him ill but he’s too far gone to feel sick. Feeling sick is a constant.

The funeral goes quickly. Mike doesn’t remember much of it. He was there, he knows he was but he can’t completely remember how it went, can’t remember the words and the steps he took. He stays with Will’s family and the Party members. Troy stays closely to Joyce and Jonathan. The two men almost holding each other’s hands. The priest talks. He doesn’t mention AIDS or sins and Mike is grateful. Will wasn’t a sinner. Will was just Will. The coffin is lowered into the ground and Mike watches. He should be devastated, broken, a crying mess. He thought he’d be but he’s not. He just stares down at this coffin and all he can feel is emptiness, strangeness. He jokes with Max, smiles and talks about his projects while his best friend is being sank underground. It’s not reaching him. His brain seems to have disconnected. Will is dead but he doesn’t remember it. He doesn’t feel it anymore.

Jane proposes he stays with them for the evening. He declines, needs

to get some air, needs to think about something else than death and the pungent smell of Will's makeup powder. He goes to Castle Byers instead, carried by unsteady feet.

Troy is already there, nursing what looks to be a bottle of whisky. It annoys Mike. Troy Harrington the bully shouldn't even be here. This was Will's personal space, his own little shelter.

"What are you doing here?" he attacks.

Troy arches his brow, oddly detached. He doesn't look like the fuming tiger Mike remembers and barely acknowledges Mike who goes sit a bit far on the right. The fort is way too small for two grown men. It's uncomfortable. Awkward. The late summer warmth makes the whole situation suffocating.

They remain silent for long minutes, watching the sun set in the horizon. Mike blinks, trembles. He suddenly thinks about Will and remembers he's dead. He misses him and the miss is enormous, terrible. Seems to crush him, swallow him all. A sob escapes his lips. His hands hurt. He feels pathetic, crying like a toddler right beside Harrington. He doesn't even know why he stayed.

A movement on his left startles him. Harrington is passing him the bottle. He blinks. The offer is casual, unspoken. His hand twitches and he reaches for it, slow and hesitant. Troy doesn't say anything. He lets Mike sip from the bottle, looking away. The liquid is warm and strong and soothes him almost immediately. He takes a few small sips, letting Will's face and absence float and drown in his hazy mind. Troy is still there, in his corner, lost in thoughts.

"How do you know this place?" Mike suddenly asks, encouraged by the alcohol.

Troy shrugs, "We often came here with Will."

The confession confuses Mike, makes him uneasy. He can't work around the fact that Will and Troy were apparently something nobody thought they could ever be.

“Did you like him or something?”

Troy chuckles humorlessly, “Yeah... You could say that!”

Mike blinks, “But you hated him. I remember. You hate fags.”

He gives the bottle back to Troy who takes a sip.

“Now don't be absurd,” Troy says, “I can't exactly hate myself. I'm not that kind of person.”

It takes a moment for Mike to understand Troy's words and even then, he's not sure he understood right.

“So you being a raging homophobe was a sham?”

“Not in the beginning. Took me years to admit it to myself. Took even longer to come out to my parents but only five minutes to pack my things and clear the fuck off!” he gives the bottle back to Mike.

“Your parents kicked you out?”

Troy chuckles again, “My dad was about to shoot me the moment I sprung out the door with my bag! It was quite the scene!” he laughs as if remembering a tender memory.

It makes Mike uncomfortable and a bit stunned. In all the possible outcomes he envisioned for the people he knew in school, Troy Harrington being a homosexual never was one of them. And yet, when he really thinks about it, it oddly makes sense.

“I found shelter in Indianapolis with Steve,” Troy continues, “Stayed at my brother's for a while. He helped me pay for my training since my parents cut me off. They threatened to cut him off too. He never gave in. I have the best brother!”

Mike stays silent for a few seconds, processing Troy's story. Steve is a great guy. There's no point denying it. He takes a longer sip, his tongue and throat already numb to the strong liquid. There are so many things he wants to know, so many things to make Will real, still here with them.

“Were you and Will dating?” he dares ask.

Troy waggles his brow, “As much as it was possible to date Will I suppose...”

His answer angers Mike who turns defensive, “What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that Will was... complicated. I tried to save him so many times... From the guys, the drugs, himself... He was like the wind, devastating and impalpable. There were days he was fine and we could do stuff, hang out, go to normal dates, vacations, make projects... But there were other days he was unreasonable. Lost and violent. His mind and body broken, still asking for more. And there was nothing I could do but obey or let go.”

Mike swallows painfully, his heart clenching in his chest.

“Did you love him?” his question is but a whisper.

“I would have walked through fire for him. I would have given him anything, made him King,” Troy shakes his head dejectedly, takes a sip from the bottle before giving it to Mike who’s still staring at him with huge, wet eyes, “I begged him to stop a thousand times... He never did... He never did...” his voice breaks, suppressing a sob.

Mike looks down, a sudden surge of sadness and longing washing over him.

“He was destroying himself,” Mike whispers painfully. Troy doesn't respond. He's staring in the distance, eyes veiled by sorrow and memory “Did you know?” Mike asks again, drunk after having almost half a bottle of whisky without any food in his system to absorb it, “Did you know he had AIDS?”

Troy shakes his head, “I was always afraid of that. Will wasn't careful and the guys he went to often were brutes who had no respect or consideration for him,” his words hurt Mike who wants to cuddle Will against his heart, “He often came back to me all bruised and bleeding. It made me sick. Going with a contaminated guy only was a matter of time really. It's also possible the guy didn't know he was

infected. We'll never know."

Anger and injustice crawl into Mike's heart. Will deserved the world. His life was so sad when it could have been filled with so much joy. It's a wound that will probably never heal.

"He loved you, you know," Troy suddenly says. Mike turns to him with a frown, "He really did. You were his prince charming," he chuckles, "I used to be so jealous of you back in the day," he chuckles again and Mike doesn't know if he's laughing or crying.

"I loved him too."

"Not the way he wanted you to."

"You don't know that," Mike replies a bit more aggressively than intended.

Troy quirks his brow, "Really? You gay now?"

"No. But I loved him beyond that. I don't have to be gay to love him."

"The way Will wanted you to love him, you had to."

"I'm not. And I still loved him all the same!"

Troy stares at him for long seconds as if deciphering him. It makes Mike uneasy.

"If something happened while you were playing nanny you need to go get tested man."

"We were careful," he sips from the bottle.

Troy snatches it from his hand angrily, "I'm serious Wheeler. You need to get tested. Fast," he shakes his head, mentioning the bottle, "And now so do I. Thanks asswat," he sounds bitter but Mike doesn't care.

"You kissed Will on the mouth when he was dying. You just endangered yourself as much as I," he responds, taking the bottle

back.

Troy doesn't say anything and silence settles back in the tiny fort. It's not an uncomfortable silence. It's a drunk one and Mike loses himself in the warm groggy feeling of being just the right amount of drunk.

"How did you two happen anyway?"

"You want the full history?" Troy ironises.

Mike shrugs, "I just wants to know."

Troy takes a deep breath, snuffles, hesitates. Mike waits. It's strange talking to Troy, drinking with Troy in Will's childhood refuge. But then again, Will is dead. What could be stranger than that?

"Classic stuff," Troy says, "Bully boy raised by bigoted parents falls hopelessly in love with queer broken boy who prostitutes himself. Goes to prostitute boy to end his obsession and see once and for all how disgusting sleeping with another boy really is," his voice turns deeper, emotional as he loses himself down memory lane, "Makes love with him. Is proven massively wrong. Falls even harder," his voice breaks and his nostrils flare, on the verge to cry.

Mike swallows, feeling just as emotional.

"You were a client?" Mike croaks. He shouldn't even be surprised.

"I was a slave," Troy whispers barely audibly, "I wanted to hate him. I really tried. I tried so hard. I wanted to find it gross, be disgusted. I wanted to hurt him, make him pay. But when I saw him, bare and so very beautiful," he snuffles emotionally, "He felt so right in my arms. I starved for him. I would have damned my soul to hold him a bit longer, to have him smile at me, see that look of trust in his eyes," he's crying saying those words.

Mike listens, entranced. Troy looks gone inside his mind. He's not even sure he remembers Mike is here with him, hearing him.

"But you weren't always a client?"

"No. Just in the beginning."

"Did you pay him for the sex?" the question makes him ill. The idea of people paying his Will to touch him intimately freaks him out. Being intimate with Will should never have been a service. It was a privilege. A privilege Mike wasn't even aware of until late, too late.

"Only when it started. It made it easier. Forced me to keep my distance and not get too attached," he chuckles humorlessly, "How did *that* work out! Beside, I know he didn't *really* want me. So paying him was more like a thank you than anything else. Thank you for letting me touch you this way. Thank you for letting me this close..."

Mike doesn't say anything. He swallows, looks down at his lap. The world spins a little. His vision has blurred a bit. He's passed the tipsy stage, going to the wasted level soon.

"Did you two really hook up?" Troy asks again, sipping from the bottle.

Mike blinks, "We fumbled. We didn't do any really gay stuff."

"Did you want to?" Mike frowns, confused. Troy continues, "Do the really gay stuff."

Mike shrugs, takes another sip from the bottle Troy hands him back, "Honestly, the idea of slipping it into another man's butt grosses me out. And I don't fancy having a cock in my mouth either. But I wanted to be close to Will. It wasn't the same with him. It was different. Will didn't let me though. Said it was too dangerous."

"Boy finally got some sense in the end..."

Mike doesn't comment. It's weird enough speaking about his sex life to Troy Harrington.

"You said Will was doing drugs?" he suddenly remembers.

Troy shrugs, "Drugs. Gang bangs. Sado masochism... Everything that had a chance at hurting him. Boy really didn't have any limit. I went to fetch him in the most sordid of places... It wasn't fun. We had so many fights about that."

Mike's heart leaps in his chest. Has he been sober, he would have felt

sick. A few tears fall on his cheeks. The image of Will being hurt is un stomachable.

"He never called me."

Troy chuckles, "I really don't understand why!" he jokes, "I can totally see you crashing a party only to find him wasted and incoherent, lying in the middle of the room, covered with jizz and spit, unable to move for days!" Mike's eyes widen, his breath hitches in his throat, nausea washing over him, "Sometimes the guys kept fucking him after he'd fallen unconscious and he couldn't remember what happened... Yeah... It was that bad!"

A new flow of tears falls on his lips. He shouldn't be so shocked. He saw Will with a guy after all, heard him. This shouldn't be a surprise. But this level of perversity... This level of sordid... This wasn't even sex at this stage. It was rape, plain and simple. Those guys were raping Will. Over and over. He suddenly thinks of Dustin who assisted to one of those sessions. He wonders if Dustin saw the exact same thing, if he got hard watching his friend being wrecked like a toy. The ball of emotions that swelled in his heart explodes and he begins to cry, the wall that contained his grief crumbled.

"I would have," he says.

Troy nods, "I know. But Will didn't want you to see him like this."

"I knew what happened. Mostly... We talked..."

"There's a difference between knowing and seeing. Trust me."

The days that follow pass in a blur. The very first morning after Will's funeral is the hardest. Mike wakes up groggy and hungover, lost and confused. He suddenly remembers that Will is dead and buried underground for good. The pain is intense to the point of choking him. It wasn't even that hard when Will was stocked in the Morgue right after going. He was still with them. Physically with them. Mike could see still him, touch him. Will was still real. Even if he was a doll.

Now Will is really gone. Mike won't see him anymore, won't touch

him again. It's over. Will can only live through memory and it's not enough.

He gets tested at the Hawkins clinic, tries to ignore the dirty looks the nurses and doctors are sending him. He's not even sure they'd look at an actual criminal with that much animosity. They say he'll receive the results in three weeks. He shrugs, doesn't care. He's not afraid. If he has to go, he'll go. What can he change of he's already infected?

He spends his days helping the Byers clean Will's room. There are dozens of diapers pack that they'll have to give. They bring Mike back to a painful reality. He remembers how they turned the changing into a game, how embarrassed Will was, apologizing to Mike over and over again.

"Really dude, that's gross, I'm sorry. You don't have to do that... Just give me the thing. Don't bother with the cleaning... I'll do it..."

"Because boys have never touch you there before!"

"Hahaha! When they do, I'm usually fully clean."

"Where's the fun in that! I'm not hurting you?"

"No."

"Is the water temperature ok?"

"Yes."

Mike blinks, looking at the pack. He doesn't even remember if it ever was awkward. Probably at first. But it became such a casual occurrence, he stopped thinking it over. Maybe that's what love really is about. Cleaning someone's shitty ass and still making candid jokes about it.

"You're my big baby!"

"I'm not a baby!"

"Turn over big baby, I'm gonna put some cream on your bumbum. It's all red and irritated."

“I’m not a baby!”

The whole room reminds Mike of Will. Every object he takes to put in a box is a piece of Will, a piece of memory, of moments that once were. It’s odd thinking they happened for real. Sometimes, he forgets how things were before Will got sick. Sometimes, it’s the only reality he knows. The stuffed rabbit Will called Mr Cuddles when he was six. He carried it everywhere, even at his sleepovers at Mike’s. The other kids used to make fun of him. One day, they even stole the toy and used it as a ball as tiny Will cried, jumping on his small legs to try and get it back. Mike got it back for him. A sob escapes his lips as he presses the worn out stuffed animal to his heart. Will was too gentle for his world. Too gentle to survive.

He remembers his soft smile, the twinkle in his green eyes. His laugh. The way he would move his hand whenever he won at game night or was just happy about something. He remembers the face he pulled when his mother insisted he had broccoli. How he wrinkled his nose when focused on a drawing. Everything about Will was endearing. Everything about Will is gone.

Chips and whisky have become his main diet. He’s not even that drunk, just the right amount of tipsy to get through the day. Two weeks have passed. Feels more like years.

Will’s room is now almost completely empty. Joyce is moving away with Jim. She doesn’t want to stay in the house where her son lived and died. It’s too painful. There are too many ghosts in the walls. Mike can hear them cry, feel them on his skin, in the air. Will’s bed and desk have been disassembled. She’s keeping the giant frame with the pictures they made for Will’s last birthday. Only a few boxes remain, scattered on the floor like relics in the sea.

He’s supposed to finish cleaning today, remove the last pieces of cloth from the closet, put the boxes in the hall with the others. He’s tipsier than usual, alone in the house. He likes it this way, makes it easier to let go. He barely talks to his parents anymore. His father almost let it slip that Will dying was a good thing. Mike hasn’t bothered after that.

There are only a few jeans in the closet left and a chest full of old toys Will didn’t want to let go. The jeans are too short for him. He

can't keep them for himself to wear but they'll do as memory. He's taken a few things like that. A Star Wars mug, some figurines, a few shirts he really likes. And a pair of jeans. The other two go in the box. He slips the chest out of the closet. It hasn't been moved in years and a huge cloud of dust flies around, making Mike cough. The chest is heavier than expected, stuck to the bottom. He managed to get it out, its weight almost knocking him over, puts back the few toys that fell on the sides, brushing off the dust.

His attention is suddenly caught by a shiny reflection from the left corner. He squints his eyes and finds an old empty bottle in the farther back of the closet. It probably was a bottle of wine Will forgot long ago. He blinks, trying to process the fact that his best friend apparently hid bottles in his closet. Was it the only one? Did he do that often? There are empty bottles of poppers too. Poppers. The gay drug they use to make it happen. He shudders in disgust.

His thoughts are disrupted by the presence of another box, smaller than the chest, as brown as the closet and covered in dust. He frowns, reaches to take it. Boxes concealed in the bottom of closets never mean any good. There could be anything inside. Treasures. Ancient nightmares.

He opens the box easily, his heart racing. Will obviously didn't want people to find it. Feeling both anxious and excited, he peaks in only to find an old sketchbook that he takes with trembling hands. It's old, tattered and yellow.

He flips it open, unveils its buried secrets. The pages are covered in drawings. It makes him chuckle sadly. Drawings of Joyce, Jonathan and Chester. Drawings of their house. Blank pages. More sketches. Eyes. Hands. Male chests. The latter make his cheeks burn and he bites his lip in semi embarrassment.

Drawings of him.

He freezes, his hand stilling on the page. Will wasn't that young when he drew it, his style already finer. His heart skips a beat. With a nervous gasp, he flips another page, more drawings of him. There's one with them very young, holding hands. It's a kid drawing, roughly made, full of colours and the hope of the innocent. Drawings of him

everywhere, framed with little hearts. As the years go, the drawings sharpen, the hearts replaced by words, poems, thoughts.

I look at you.

You don't see me.

You never will because you're not like me.

And I'll love you forever.

I wish you could see me.

Mike.

Mike.

Mike.

I love you.

If you loved me, I'd be the best boyfriend for you. I'd take good care of you. I'd cook you your favorite food and we'd live in a wooden cottage by the lake with a dog and comic books everywhere.

Mike.

A drawing of him in charcoal, bare-chested, angel wings framing his torso. A surge of emotion washes over him, almost knocking the air out of him and his eyes suddenly burn with birthing tears. He could have felt embarrassed that Will drew him half-naked, that he evidently held sexual fantasies about him. He's not. He doesn't feel embarrassment. He only feels pain. Devastating pain. Guilt. How much energy had Will wasted over him? Pining over him? Loving him, wanting him so fiercely? Will probably drew this when he was still innocent in the ways of love, experiencing his first emotions, his first awareness. Mike pictures him in his room, all sweet and pure, drawing him with the smile of puppy love and his heart breaks. Will probably wanted to have his first kiss with Mike, his first everything...

He falls back, the sketchbook hugged against him as he cries like he never cried before. Not even when Will died or went underground. He knows what unrequited love feels like. He's had his own heart crushed by a girl in junior year. It wasn't even a girl he dated. Only

one he liked from a distance and known for a few months. Will spent his entire life loving Mike, heartbroken and unloved back. And he still managed to be the most supportive of friends in spite of it all. He could have been jealous, resentful. He never was. When Mike needed a shoulder on which to cry, Will was there, comforting him, telling him he'd find another girl, a better one, helping him seduce the girls he wanted. He still remembers this one time Will gave him the best advice to ask Charlene out, remembers how Will encouraged him all the way, all smiles and thumbs up as he went to talk to her, how genuinely happy Will was when he told him she agreed to go on a date.

A sob strangles him. Will was the sweetest boy. And that sweetest boy loved him with all his heart. His grieving mind replays the scene at his seventeenth birthday. How elated Will looked when Mike kissed him. The only time they kissed.

"Let me make you feel good."

He chokes on the memory, chokes on Will's beautiful, tragic devotion. Will would have probably enjoyed being touched back. Mike knew Will wanted him, could feel it. He just chose to ignore it then and let Will burn. He runs his fingers on the charcoal wings. Something more could have happened in that basement. Will wasn't sick at the time. Mike could have loved him without fear. He could have given him so much more than the clumsy mishandle he dared near the end. Mike knows how wonderful it feels to be touched by the right person. He experienced it many times. But even dying of love for him, Will still refused the contact when it became dangerous. For Mike.

His tears take long minutes to run dry and when he's done crying, he feels heavy and exhausted. He snuffles, looks back into the box for the rest of the concealed objects. The sketchbook hid pictures that he takes with shaky hands and nervous gasps. Pictures of him too. Nothing private, just candid pictures of Mike smiling, in everyday situations. Pictures they usually take when in trips all together. Under the pictures is another little black bag. Mike frowns, his heart leaping in his chest. Is this about him too? Is this box a special Mike box? The bag hides something square.

A tape.

He swallows. A tape of what? Of Mike sleeping? Eating breaking? Doing something else? His hands tremble. He isn't sure he really wants to know. Will wasn't a perv. This he knows. Will was broken and let horrible things be done to him but he wasn't a creep. He would have never filmed Mike without Mike knowing. So this can only be a childhood memory tape. Joyce used to film them a lot when Will was little.

He takes a deep breath, walks to the living room on shabby legs. His hand grabs the bottle of wine he left on the kitchen counter and brings it his lips, taking long, generous sips. A quick glance at the clock announces it's almost 5pm. Jezebel will be furious he didn't call again but he doesn't care. He's not even sure he loves her anymore. When he lets go of the bottle, it's almost empty and his head buzzes agreeably. He feels warm, brave enough to face what's on this tape. He's not sure he's ready to see Will as a kid, all young and innocent. Cute little Will.

The tape slips into the VHS player. His finger presses the ON button of the TV. He licks his lip, bits it, his hands getting clammier with anxiety.

The image switches on toddlers dressed in fruits on a stage. A new sob escapes Mike's lips. It's one of the very first school plays he'd done with Will. The first year they met. Will is on the left, dressed as a peach, smiling and waving his tiny little hand. Mike isn't so far, dressed as an apple. They're all singing shyly on the music, their parents encouraging them in the crowd. Mike chuckles, nostalgic. They were so innocent then. He grabs the controller, fast forwards to the next dance with Will in his peach costume. And he's so cute, Mike coos through the tears. He sniffles, fast forwards again, taking a sip from the wine.

The image switches. Will isn't in his peach costume anymore. He's not even a toddler. He's a teenager, naked on a bed, being kissed senseless by a boy his age Mike has never seen before. The boy is thrusting inside him, Will's legs wide apart, his head thrashed backward in sexual abandon, the other boy devouring his jaw and neck hungrily.

The bottle falls to the ground in a metallic echo. Mike can't even hear it. His eyes are huge, glued to the screen on the image of his best friend being fucked in front of a camera. Will pushes his feet on the boy's chest, moaning and panting so loud, it forces Mike to look away, nausea boiling up.

He stops the video abruptly, the screen turning black, Will's sex face and moans replaced by silence. Mike swallows, his breathing laborious. Was the hell is that? Did Will do porn too? Or was it just a sex tape he recorded for fun? Did Will have sex for fun? He's thinking so hard and so fast, his head hurts, the image of screen Will burnt in his visual memory. He knows Will's sex face. He made him come twice. But he's never seen two boys go that far before featuring Will in the passive role. It leaves him confused and nauseous. It's something he shouldn't have seen.

He remains on his knees, in front of the TV for long minutes, unable to think or move, his whole body frozen in shock. A hundreds of emotions crash into his heart and brain. He feels sick to the point of throwing up.

He doesn't sleep for days, haunted by Will's absence and what he saw on that tape. He kept it and the sketchbook too. He tries not to think of it, wants to throw it away, can't bring himself to. It's a memory of Will alive and breathing. True, it's an odd memory but it's something and Mike wants to keep everything.

Will has been dead for almost a month. The Byers house is empty. Mike watches the last pieces of furniture being moved out, the couch on which Will and he played. The table where Will sat to draw. He cleaned Mr Cuddles, gives it back pristine to Joyce who cries, thanking him. She says he can keep it if he wants. He does. He receives the test results from the clinic. He's negative, clean. Will's touch left him untainted. He doesn't even know if that makes him happy. At least, Will's touch would have left him with something of his... Now, there's officially nothing.

There's a Party reunion in Castle Byers in honor of Will. They'll light candles for their friend, remember him all together. Jane is joining an AIDS activist group. Ever since her brother died, she's gotten awfully vindictive about the government's action and pharmaceutical

corporations. She says Will died because they didn't do enough. Because the government hates homosexuals and pharmaceutical corporations thrive on their deaths.

They're all quiet. Will's death has made the reunions awkward. They've all carried on with their lives. Only Mike seems stuck in the past. Mike and El. Because he's the lovelorn best friend and she, the grieving sister.

"Come on Mike," Lucas nudges him, "Stop sulking man. Life goes on. You're not the one who died."

"How can you say that?" Mike spits, feeling a surge of outrage boil up, "Will is dead. Your friend is dead!"

"Yes and I miss him. But Will wouldn't have wanted us to stop living because of it! Quite contrary."

"I must say," Dustin intervenes, his cigarette stuck between his lips, "I agree with Sinclair on this. We all miss Will but we owe him to keep going."

"You don't get to talk about Will!" Mike seethes, his words full of venom as he bears into Dustin with unveiled disgust, "You shouldn't even be here, remembering him with us."

Dustin frowns. The others look at Mike with a confused expression.

"You have a problem with me Wheeler? Come on. Spit it! You've been giving me the death glare for weeks now!"

The two men stare at each other with a tension so thick it makes the air unbreathable. Dustin towers over Mike, his dark eyes shining dangerously.

"You know why," Mike whispers, not faltering.

"No. I don't. If you have something to say, say it."

Mike grimaces hatefully, "How could you?" he breathes and Dustin's jaw clenches, "How could you do that to him? Will was your friend."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," Dustin replies in a voice as cold as ice.

Mike ignores him, "He was your friend and you violated him!"

Around them, the others exchange worried glances. Jane rolls her eyes, annoyed. Dustin blinks, leaning towards Mike.

"If you're referring to the frat party then know that everything that happened there was consensual."

"You used him like a toy. You hurt him!" Mike has yelled the last word, his emotional sensitivity pushed to the breaking point as he starts crying uncontrollably.

"I did not!" Dustin strongly counters, "And neither did the others. Will was ok with this. He was ok with all of it."

"No he was not."

"He was. We didn't hurt him. I can assure you of that. We were gentle and respectful."

Mike snorts through the tears, "Respectful?! You treated him like a whore! You paid to fuck him! It's disgusting. You don't do that to a friend!"

"I loved Will!" Dustin thunders, his face flushed by fury, "He was my best friend too. I would have never hurt him or let anyone hurt him. Don't you ever dare insinuating that I caused him harm. You weren't there. Will let us have an experience. Yes, it was a bit odd and I truly hadn't seen that coming when Jeff said he wanted to try something new. But it happened and I don't regret it. It was a nice experience. Confusing. Different. Something I'll never do again. But it was nice. We didn't force Will to do anything. My friends asked politely. He gave us his full consent. They were nice to him, kept making sure he was ok and having a good time with us."

"And you watched like it was some sort of sordid entertainment," Mike seethes between clenched teeth, his hands balled into fists of rage.
“

“Yes, it was hot. Will was hot. He was a sex performer and he was good at it. The head he gave me? Best blowjob ever! Worth way more than the twenty bucks he took for it. Maybe you should have asked him to give you a full ride. Might have done you some good!”

“I would have never treated Will this way!” Mike spits, knowing full well it’s a lie.

Dustin snorts disdainfully, “Oh please Mike, don’t lie to me. I know what happened in your basement a few years ago. Don’t play innocent.”

“What happened between Will and I has nothing to do with what you and what your Zepa friends did to him!”

“No, you broke his heart. You made him believe he could have a shot with the boy of his dreams only to crush his hopes later. Maybe my friends and I fucked him like a toy as you say, at least we kept it professional and we reciprocated! Something you didn’t do!”

Mike swallows, his heart jumping in the back of his throat. He has never felt that mad before.

“Will died because guys like you kept it *professional*. He wasn’t a plaything. His body wasn’t a self-service. I don’t care if you think you were nice because you asked for his permission to rent his butt. What you did is unacceptable. Will was broken. Hurt. He was destroying himself and you played along. You’re part of the problem that led him to the grave. You’re no better than the guy who contaminated him.”

Mike feels it before he sees it, Dustin’s huge fist connecting with his jaw. His vision blackens immediately and he falls to the ground, almost losing consciousness.

“Dustin!” Max yells.

Lucas and Jane grab him by the arms so that he doesn’t attack Mike again. Dustin struggles, looking at Mike with pure hatred.

“Don’t you *ever* assimilate me to the monster who infected him. You hear me? Never! I can listen to your bullshit but this is my limit. You

have no idea what you're talking about. Will was one of my closest friends. You don't know anything about the relationship we had or what he shared. I would have killed for that boy. What happened that night happened in mutual trust and affection. We didn't rape him or any shit like that. I won't let you propagate disgusting crap!"

Mike spits blood, "Whatever suits your little world," he grumbles, not looking at Dustin who dances on his feet like a worm.

"Fuck you, Wheeler."

"No, that you won't."

Dustin turns to Lucas and Jane, "Let me go. Let me go!"

They release him and Dustin huffs, grabs a beer. Awkward, heavy silence settles in the tiny fort. The tension is unbearable. Mike wipes the blood from his split lip, glaring at Dustin's back.

"Uhm, just out of morbid curiosity," Lucas suddenly asks, "Am I the only guy in Hawkins who hasn't had sex with Will?"

"There's Jonathan," Jane proposes. Lucas blinks with a grimace, "And my dad too," she continues, hesitant.

Lucas pouts. Jane shrugs. Mike ignores them.

He stays in his room for the rest of the weekend. He's not moving, barely eating. He and Dustin are no longer talking. They're both mad at each other for their own reasons. Mike cannot believe Dustin lives it so well. It's disgusting. There's no affection or trust or real consent when you fuck someone for money. There's no respect either. Mike won't believe it. He hurt Will. He caused him harm.

He nurses the bottle of whisky, sipping from it until the familiar numbness cuddles his brain and thoughts become clearer and louder at the same time. He flips through the old tattered sketchbook, watching the pictures Will drew of him with a drunk detachment. There are a few dots on the pages, like stains of dry blood. His eyes dart on the bag hidden behind the cushion. He swallows. His TV shines in the middle of the room, the VHS player calling to him almost obscenely. He can't do this. He's not drunk enough. His feet

carry him to the armchair on their own accord and he gets the tape from under the cushion with a trembling hand. He can't do this.

He slips the VHS into the player, takes a sip of whisky, turns the TV on. His heart is racing in his chest. He rewinds the tape to the beginning of the scene. Will is still fully clothed. He's making out with the boy, their hands embracing the other's body. They're the same height and have the same type of body, not very tall but narrow and lanky. They bite each other's lips, licks each other's tongues. It grosses Mike out. Boys kissing really isn't his thing. Will lifts his arms above his head as the other slips his shirt over, revealing his skinny hairless torso. It makes Mike swallow with a sad pout of longing. The other boy's hands slide down his waist to the belt of his jeans. Mike grimaces in anticipation. The rational part of his brain is perfectly aware of the awkwardness of the situation. It's creepy, watching a porn movie of his gay deceased best friend. He's a perv. But he's drunk and curious and he doesn't care. He'll be mad at himself later, when the alcohol leaves him sick and hungover in the morning.

The other boy massages him through his pants, licks his cheek, his eyes dark with lust as he looks at Will as if he were food. Mike grimaces again. It's getting really, really gay and it makes him awfully uneasy. Will hops on the bed behind them, removes the boy's shirt. The boy pulls Will's boxers down and Mike gasps as Will's pretty little cock is freed from the cloth. Mike frowns, remembers the feel of it on his palm. He doesn't even know when he started thinking of Will's cock as pretty. He doesn't find cocks pretty or arousing or anything. They disgust him. But not Will's. Will's is pretty and he wishes he could feel it in his hand again. How warm it was, how it pulsed under his fingers. Will's body expressing his love. It makes his heart swell. On the screen, Will gasps as the other jerks him off, shuffles on his knees, licks Will's semi hard length slowly. Mike's body twitches. It's gross. It really is. He watches the other boy engulf Will's cock in his mouth. He's slow, takes his time. Mike wants to stop the video. He's not aroused. He wants to vomit.

He grabs the controller, fast forwards. Will is on his back and elbows, sucking the boy's cock. The other towers above him, risen on his knees, his hands around Will's head to set a rhythm way too brutal. It makes Mike gag and he fast forwards again.

He stops a few scenes later. Will is on his back, his legs apart, hips raised. The other boy is blowing him and his finger slips inside Will. It makes Mike's heart skip a beat painfully. He feels disgusted and embarrassed, his face heating up with a strange warmth. He doesn't want to see his Will getting fucked. The other boy steps aside, looks up at Will with that same hunger in his eyes, sinking his teeth into his lip in want. Will is breathing heavily, looking down at the boy. They exchange another glance and the boy looks down. His hands spread Will's buttocks and Mike hiccups loudly. He can clearly see it, the red slightly swollen little hole nestled between those cheeks. Will is completely shaved. There's not a single hair in his butt or around his cock, the skin pink and smooth. He heard about it, knows it's apparently a trend among gays, can't say he doesn't like it. He does. Makes Will's reddish hole look so inviting. Tantalizing. The other boy seems to agree. He opens his mouth and closes it on Will's anus. Mike hiccups again, eyes going impossibly wide. He didn't see that coming. Didn't even know it was something people do.

He stops the video immediately. What the Hell? His head is buzzing with a strange emotion. It's not really arousal as he knows it. It's arousal forced in spite of yourself and he doesn't like it. He removes the video from the player, hides it back under the cushion, promises himself he'll never watch it again. If only out of respect to his deceased friend. He finishes the bottle of whisky, falls asleep on his bed, dreams about sweaty skin and slick bodies.

He spends the evening with Jezebel. They haven't been alone together in weeks. She's still as sweet and supportive as she's always been. She made him dinner to cheer him up. They talk. He talks about Will. She listens. They try to fuck. Mike's cock refuses to harden. There's something wrong with the body he's holding. Too many curves. The sounds she makes annoy him. Her scent prickles his nose. He remembers Will's scent, Will's warm flesh, Will's pretty eyes when he came. They blame his impotence on his grieving. He knows better. She's not the one he wants. The problem is that he can't have the one he wants. That person is dead, buried underground, rotting in a box.

He watches the video again. Bits and pieces of close ups focused on Will. Sobs, agonizing over his beauty, ignores completely the other

boy. He knows it's absolutely unhealthy. Something is wrong with him. He's going insane. He misses Will like he'd miss an amputated limb and still feel the ghost of it attached to his flesh. Sometimes, when he's alone in the darkness of his room, he loses himself in ghost-like alcohol-induced fantasies, hugging the mattress as he'd hold Will's body. It makes him hard and it makes him cry, Will's lips never finding his.

"Mike? Honey?" he turns his head toward his bedroom door. His mother is looking at him with sad, hesitant eyes, "You should get some air," she tries, "You've been locked up in here for days."

"I'm good mom."

She sighs, "Sweety, please. I know how difficult it is..."

"Don't. Just don't. Don't try and pretend you're sad with me. Will's death made you happy!"

Karen's expression hardens, "It isn't true Michael. We liked this boy. We did not approve of his lifestyle but him dying at such a young age is a tragedy. I am a mother too."

Mike takes a deep breath, "It wasn't a lifestyle!"

"Michael please. Will made choices in his life that led him to where he ended. It wasn't his fault. Poor boy was lost and broken. But you're still alive. You're young. Don't forsake your life now."

"I am sick and tired of people telling me to keep living!" he explodes, jumping from his bed.

"Michael!" she calls but he walks past her, putting on jeans and a shirt hastily, "We have been understanding, your father and I. We gave you time. We know you've been drinking and haven't said anything."

"I'm twenty-one. I'm an adult."

"Than act like one!" he glares at her, grabs his jacket and walks out the room. "Michael!"

He ignores her, hops in his car and starts the engine. He drives for two hours to Indianapolis. He's slightly hungover and the world looks strange around him. There are too many people, too many colors, too many sounds. He wanders in the streets aimlessly, unshaved, hands in pockets. He probably looks awful. He doesn't care. It will be the end of July soon. Will loved July. He loved the summer. He smokes a few cigarettes, gets a sandwich to try and appease his stomach cramps, the aftertaste of whisky in his mouth making him nauseous.

He walks for a full hour, really not knowing where he's going. Night has fallen. The streets are buzzing with people enjoying the summer nightlife. The noise and light feel like an aggression. He stares in the distance and around him, frowns, checks his position. There are a few bars, people on the pavement. He knows that neighborhood. It's the gay hotspot. He came here once with Will a few years ago. He swallows, his eyes scanning the area a bit nervously. He shouldn't be here. He suddenly stops. On the opposite sidewalk, there is a boy about his age. He has brown hair and huge eyes. He immediately reminds him of Will. The boy doesn't move. He seems to be waiting. Mike isn't stupid. He knows the boy is a hooker. Will taught him to recognize them. All in him has frozen and for a moment, he sees Will in that very same position. He wonders if Will worked the game too, if he waited for men to talk to him. How did Will make it happen?

His stomach cramps are back. He blinks, observing the boy on his sidewalk. Their eyes meet. The boy quirks his brow, seems to beckon him. Mike swallows. He wants to walk away, blinks, sees Will. His feet cross the street. He stops in front of the boy, his brain switched off.

"Hi," he says.

The boy smiles at him, "Hello there," his smile looks like Will's. His eyes are green too. They make Mike's heart beat faster. He swallows, feeling like a fool. Now what? The boy seems to sense his confusion, "Is there anything I can do for you?" he gently nudges.

"What's your name?" Mike blurts out.

"Sam."

"Is this your real name?"

“Yes. But if you don’t like it, we can still change it.”

Mike shakes his head. He wonders if Will gave his real name too. If he told the men they could change it.

“One really creepy time, I gave a trick to an older man. He had one of those weird pedobear kinks. Made me call him daddy while fucking me in his car. I was his good little boy.”

“That’s disgusting, Will.”

Will laughs, the smoke of the cigarette dancing on the ceiling, “It was. Gross as fuck. I couldn’t wait for it to end. He didn’t even paid that well.”

“No. Sam’s fine. It’s fine.”

Sam smiles, “Good then.”

Mike studies him. He looks cute and friendly with dimples and huge expressive eyes. Will’s eyes were expressive too. But he didn’t have any dimples.

“How much do you take?” the question leaves his mouth before he can even process it. What the Hell is he doing?

Sam looks unaffected, “Depends on what you want.” Mike blinks, lost and confused. What the Hell is he doing? Sam seems to understand the situation and takes pity on him, “Never done that before?” Mike shakes his head, “Have you ever been with a boy?” he asks.

Mike shrugs, “A little. But... I’m not...” he doesn’t even know what he’s supposed to say.

“Do you want to spend some time with me?” Sam tries softly, “We don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable doing. And if we don’t do anything, you don’t have to pay me.”

Mike looks up at the boy, staring at him like a frightened animal. Sam is smiling at him and for a second, Will is smiling at him too.

He nods, “Ok.”

Sam's smile widens, "Awesome! My apartment's just here. Sounds good to you?" Mike nods again, completely stunned. Sam smiles again, "Awesome!"

He follows Sam like a robot, unable to think or even understand what he's doing. So that's how it went? Boys talked to Will in the street and he brought them to his place to let them fuck him? His brain slowly processes that he's about to have alone time with a gay hooker too. How did that ever happen? He's not even sure he wants it. He's not even into guys! Will is an exception. And not paying this boy because he can't do it seems rude and unfair. He went to that boy after all.

Sam's apartment is small but cosy. There are colors everywhere, posters on the walls, a guitar in the corner.

"Do you want to drink something?" Sam asks, rummaging into the small fridge in the open kitchen across the main room.

"Uhm..." Mike stammers.

Sam continues, "I have beer. Water. And... tomato soup," Sam turns to him, "Beer?"

Mike nods, stunned and awfully shy. What the Hell is he doing here? He takes the beer Sam offers him with a smile. He shouldn't drink. He's still hungover and alcohol seems like the worst idea ever.

"So, what's your name?" Sam asks, sitting on his couch.

Mike hesitates, joins him.

"Mike."

"Well hello Mike. Nice to meet you!"

Mike chuckles, uncomfortable. The silence settles for long seconds. Mike wants to leave. He has no idea what he's doing here. He's not even in the mood for sex. It's awkward as Hell. Sam, however, looks fine and unaffected by the situation. He sips on his beer steadily.

"What do you do in life?" Sam asks again, striking another

conversation.

“I study journalism,” Mike answers.

Sam nods, “That’s cool. In which University?”

“Chicago.”

“Chicago's a great city. My brother lives there.”

“You have a brother?”

“Yep. Older brother. I also have three sisters. We’re from Nevada originally.”

“And you moved here?”

“I came here for my studies. There’s a great Architecture school.”

Mike quirks his brow, “You’re a student?”

“Yes. I’ll be starting my second year in September.”

So they are the same age.

Mike is confused, “But... If you’re going to college then why...” he can’t finish his sentence.

Sam smiles, apparently used to the question, “Why am I doing this?” Mike nods, “Simple, I need to make a living for myself while I’m in college. My parents helped with the school but I have to support myself for the rest.”

Mike’s confusion deepens, “You could have found another way! Like, I don’t know, working at Walmart!”

Sam sips on his beer, his legs crossed, “Nah! That’s too mainstream!”

Mike chuckles, unprepared for such an answer, “So you like doing it.”

“Of course I do! It’s great. Sure, I’ve had a couple of bad experiences but most of the time it’s really nice. I get to meet loads of different guys and I’m paid for the thing I love doing most.”

“You make it sound like it’s a dream job!”

“No, it’s not. It’s just a job.”

“You’re not scared?”

Sam frowns, “Of what?”

Mike shrugs, “I don’t know... AIDS... Creeps...”

“You just have to be careful. Don’t do this job if you’re unwell in your head. I don’t kiss and I don’t do anything without condoms. That’s my number one rule and it’s not negotiable. If a guy doesn’t want to abide, he leaves. Same goes for the creeps. And I have my set number of practices. I don’t do bondage or stuff like that and I refuse to do weird humiliating things. I do this job by choice not to get bothered by pervs.”

Mike tilts his head to the side, “You’re talking to me.”

Sam smirks, “You don’t strike me as a creepy guy. More like the lost, confused straight guy who doesn’t know what he’s doing here.”

Mike frowns, “You know I’m not gay?!”

Sam gives him a long knowing look, “Honey. I knew you were straight the second I saw you on that sidewalk.”

“And you agreed to talk to me and let me here. Why?”

Sam shrugs, “I’ve done it with straight guys before. It’s not a problem.”

“You don’t mind being a straight guy’s gay experience?”

“Why would I mind? I’ve had great moments with straight guys. Sometimes even better than gay guys. Gay guys are usually very mechanic in what they want. They fuck me or want me to fuck them. It’s quick, uneventful. Straight guys are more curious, shyer. They’re usually questioning their sexuality. It’s cute. I’ve had straight clients who came back to me a few times more.”

“You’re not afraid they’ll freak out and leave?”

“It’s part of the game. When it happens, we end it here. I never pressure anyone. I give options. The guys are free to go. Usually, they’re always ok for a blowjob. They want to know if it’s really better than a girl’s,” Sam winks, “I hardly ever disappoint.”

Mike chuckles. He suddenly remembers the head Will gave him years ago. It *was* good. But it was Will, so it doesn’t really compare. He loses himself in the memory again, eyes clouded with sadness. His sweet, sweet Will. He misses him. He had almost forgotten Will is dead. He suddenly remembers and it hits him as it always does, like waking up with a slap. He’s snapped back to reality by Sam clapping his fingers.

“Gay earth to Mike?!”

Mike shakes his head, “Sorry.”

Sam studies him, “Are you ok?” he asks softly.

Mike swallows, “I don’t know.”

“Why did you talk to me?” Sam suddenly asks, “You’re not here because you’re questioning your sexuality. You’re not. I can recognize a sexually curious guy. They try stuff, ask me questions about how it’s done. You haven’t. You’re not here for the sex,” Mike swallows, “Why are you here, Mike?” Sam says and it sounds like Will’s voice. It makes his heart skip a beat.

“My best friend was a prostitute,” Mike suddenly confesses, looking in the distance before him, with unfocused eyes, “He died of AIDS a month ago.”

Sam pouts, squinting his eyes. He doesn’t look that surprised, “I’m really sorry for your friend. AIDS is a real bitch. You sound like you loved him very much.”

A few tears fall on Mike’s cheeks, “I did. He was my Will,” he sniffles, “You remind me of him. Not just the hooker stuff. He had the same brown hair and green eyes. And he was an artist.”

“Is this why you came to me? Because I look like him?”

“Told you I was a creep.”

Sam shrugs, “No. You just want to be close to your friend. Everybody mourns their own way. There’s no defined rule.”

“I miss him so very much. We were always together since the age of five. He was always with me.”

“The way you talk about this Will, you make it sound like you loved him more than a friend,” Sam points out.

Mike swallows, “I loved him. But I went gay for him too late. We never really did anything anyway. He was sick so physical intimacy was off the list.”

“Do you wish you had?”

“Yes,” Mike breathes, “So very much.” He looks up at Sam who’s staring at him, “I won’t be able to do anything. I’m sorry.”

Sam dismisses him, “No worries. I told you. I don’t pressure.”

“Still. I wasted your time.”

“Talking never is a waste of time.”

He puts his empty beer bottle on the table in front of them, sinks his hand in his pocket for his wallet and gets a twenty dollar bill out that he hands to Sam.

“Here. Thank you for your time.”

Sam bites his lip, “You don’t have to. We didn’t do anything.”

“I insist.”

Sam nods, takes the bill, “Thanks.”

Mike smiles at him, “Thank you for listening to my ramble. I’m a mess.”

"We underestimate a good ramble!" Mike chuckles. Sam walks him to the door. He turns to Mike, his playful expression more serious, "I hope you get better. Those things take time to heal," Mike nods, "If you ever change your mind and need a spirit lift, come see me again. It'll be a pleasure."

Mike nods again, biting his lip, "Thanks Sam. It was nice meeting you."

Sam smirks, "It was meeting you too Mike."

He walks back to his car, feeling like a stranger to himself. He still doesn't know why he talked to that boy. His mind keeps drifting back to Will. Was it how it happened with Will too? Sam was a nice down to earth guy.

He watches memory videos of Will and the Party. Birthdays, road trips, Halloween parties. Will as a kid, Will as a teenager. Will everywhere. He cuddles around an old t-shirt he kept from the room cleaning, buries his nose in it to try and retrieve Will's smell. It's faint but here and it comforts him a little. His mother tries to reason with him, tells him he needs to stop, that it's morbid and unhealthy. That no boy should behave like this after the loss of another male friend. That it's tendentious. That he needs to spend more time with Jezebel. If only she knew of the morbid things Mike has done. He's watched the video again, keeps telling himself he mustn't, that it's gross and creepy, does it all the same. He watches it in the dead of the night, eyes full of longing glued to the screen on Will's face and body, rewinding the blowjob and rimming parts over and over again. He doesn't care much for the fucking, only wants to see Will be given pleasure. He'd do anything to touch Will this way, love him this way.

He never will. He'll never get to be the boy in the video, never get to make love to him, pleasure him, know what's like to be inside this lovely body and come, nestled in the deepest of him. He could have. He didn't. Now it's too late and it breaks him.

The first time he comes watching the video, his eyes are focused on exposed Will's exposed entrance and he wants to sink into that body and make it his new home. When the moment passes, he realizes that he masturbated on the porn video featuring his dead best friend

being fucked by another sex worker. It's worse than voyeurism. It's monstrous. He's a horrible person.

He sniffles, stares at the old Supercom in his hand, turns it on for the first time in years. He feels stupid, knows he'll speak to emptiness.

"Hey Will," his voice croaks, "I wanted to talk to you. I know you can't hear me but I wanted to talk to you," tears fall on his cheeks, "I miss you. Please come back. Please Will. Please. Please. It's so horrible here without you. I'm sorry for what I did... I don't know what's happening to me. I need you. Please come back. You can't be gone forever," he sobs loudly in the Supercom, the hysterical flow of tears making his breathing painful and difficult.

He knows Will won't answer and it makes it all the worse. He cries until his face hurts and falls asleep, exhausted, his plea unanswered.

What is he doing in a gay bar, he doesn't know it himself. Will was gay. He went to those places to find boys like him. Being in a gay bar is a bit like being with Will. He sniffles, looks around, drinks his vodka. There are boys kissing other boys in the corners, posters of naked men on the walls. It makes Mike uneasy. He doesn't belong here. It's his third cocktail. He's drunk. Will often found himself drunk in gay bars too.

"How many were they?" Mike says with an aggravated sigh. Will turns to him with a frown. Mike elaborates, "You look in pain. How many?"

"Just one but he didn't use any lube and had the stamina of a horse so it kind of felt like being fucked by 11 inches of gravel."

Mike grimaces, "Seriously Will, that's not the kind of thing I want to picture right now."

"You don't have to picture anything, I'm just telling you. If you knew all the things that were shoved in my ass! That's nothing."

"Yeah, good thing I don't!" Mike almost yells, terribly uneasy, "Jesus fuck Will. Don't you have any cute anecdote about nice guys who got you stuffed animals at the faire or bought you ice cream for a change? Are all your gay stuff weird and disgusting like that?"

"Mostly yeah. What? I don't do cute. It's boring."

Mike shakes his head, "You're hopeless."

"You're the one who asked."

"Was he client?"

"No. Just a guy I met in a bar."

"Please, tell me you were careful."

"I always am."

"Hi."

Mike turns to see a blond man on the stool next to him. He swallows.

"Hi."

"New here? I've never seen you," Mike nods, "I'm Jared. What's your name?"

Mike wants to send this guy packing, wants to answer *Not interested*. This man isn't cute like Sam. He's sending huge predatory vibes and Mike knows why. Had he been himself, he would have told the man to fuck off and find another prey. But Mike isn't himself. He's drunk in a gay hotspot, grieving over the loss of the one he loved. Will would have answered. Will would have played along and jumped on the occasion as he always did, with every guy he met.

"It's Mike," he says.

"Hi Mike. Can I get you a drink?"

The man's eyes have darkened. He knows exactly what the guy wants, seen the likes of him before in clubs, hitting on girls the same way. Mike doesn't falter. He doesn't want to be afraid. Will wouldn't have been. He would have gone for it.

"Sure."

Jared's lips stretch into a calculated smile. He gets him a glass of

scotch. Just what Mike needed to go from drunk to positively wasted. It's not so bad. Maybe that'll numb enough to play his part well.

He doesn't exactly remember how but he follows him to the back of the bar. In the depth of his mind, he can hear a voice. It sounds strangely like Will's. *Don't do that Mike! You don't know that guy. Don't do this like that. You're not me. Don't hurt yourself like that. Don't do that to yourself!* Mike shakes his head, chases the voice off. He lets Jared kiss him. It's rough and unpleasant. It has nothing to do with the kiss he shared with Will all those years ago. The way Will's hand touched his cheek ever so sweetly, the way he melted in the kiss. Jared doesn't melt and Mike certainly doesn't feel like melting either. He's not even aroused. Jared doesn't seem to care. Is this what Will felt when guys he didn't know, didn't really want, kiss him? This strange feeling of robbery?

"Don't mind if I top?" Jared says against his lips.

Mike blinks. He has no idea what those words mean. Jared takes his silence for a yes. All that happens next is a blur to Mike's time memory. He's way too intoxicated to be coherent or even truly conscious of his surroundings. *Mike don't do this!* From the way Jared flips him on his stomach on the couch and pulls down his jeans, he understands he's going to fuck him. He doesn't want this Jared to fuck him, doesn't want to be his bitch, doesn't want his first intimate time with a boy to happen this way. He only wants Will.

He hears the sound of a condom being ripped open. At least, the guy is being safe.

"It was protected. The condom broke."

Pain. That's all he can feel as something hard and way too big forces its way between his cheeks. It's a bit wet too, probably from the lube. It's horrible. It burns, tears him, feels like gravel being shoved dry into him. He hates it. Tears fall on his face. He doesn't want to cry, can't help it. So that's what it feels like? Having a cock pushed into you? How can girls enjoy this? It's the worst sensation ever. Feels like a dismemberment, an execution. Was this what Will felt? Was his sweet Will hurting that much too? The man's cock keeps pushing into him, stretching him more, setting his flesh on fire.

“God. You’re super tight,” Jared gasps behind him, “You a virgin or what?”

A virgin. Yes, he’s a virgin. Was. He’d never done anything like that before. No one ever found their way inside him before. He wonders how Will’s first time was like. Was it similar to this? Would it have been different if Will was the one moving inside him? Would have Mike enjoyed it then? Or would it have killed him the same? He looks up to the dark corner of the room, head spinning with the alcohol and pain. Will is here, looking at him in the corner. He’s crying, his white face streaked by tears. Mike hiccups, freezes, his heart missing a beat.

“Why Mike?”

“Will...”

Mike blinks. Will is gone. There’s no one in that corner, only the dark wall that keeps the room together. It stops. Jared has come. The ride is over. Mike breathes, his body sore beyond everything that is imaginable. His tears have dried on his cheeks.

“Why didn’t you tell me it was your first time?” Jared says. Mike belts his jeans up, shrugs, really doesn’t care, “Don’t you go say I raped you or some shit.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

Jared huffs, “Yeah, you better... Stupid kids...”

He’s gone, leaving Mike alone in the backroom. His pants are sticky with the lube and his backside throbs painfully. He ignores it, looks back at the corner with a frown. He saw Will. He knows he did. He’s completely drunk and not making any sense with himself but Will looked so real. White and transparent. Like a ghost. Are there such things? There are other dimensions and monsters without eyes after all. So ghosts. Doesn’t sound so weird in the end.

He splashes water on his face, looks into the mirror, stares at his own reflection, doesn’t recognize himself. His whole body feels strange, foreign. Is this what Will felt too? His stomach turns. He hurries to

the nearest stall, throws up everything he has to throw up, chocks and trembles, wants to die. He blinks, back in his bed without remembering how he came to be here, floating somewhere between sleep and awakesness. The mattress creaks under the weight of something. His heart misses a beat.

“Will...”

A pressure touches his forehead. He leans into it.

“Will...”

The pressure slides on his cheek, his lips. His body is completely paralyzed by sleep. He can't move, only feel this strange pressure, this presence he can't see.

“Will...”

He wants to feel more of Will, wants Will to possess him.

“Will... Please, stay with me.”

“Don't hurt yourself Mike. Please. I can't bear to see you in pain.”

“Will...”

“I'm here... I'll always be with you. I love you.”

“Take me with you.”

“Live Mike. Please, live.”

“I can't without you.”

When he wakes up the next morning, it takes him a long moment to find his senses. He screwed up. More than ever. What the Hell is wrong with him? The hangover kicks in a second after waking up. His whole head hurts and he vomits again. He feels disgusting, violated, the touch of the man still burning his inner flesh. He stays in his bed all day, tries to hear Will, feel him again. He doesn't. There doesn't seem to be a ghost in this room. He hallucinated. Will is really gone. He sniffles, snuggles into Mr Cuddles, wants Will to be

here with him.

He does it again. Goes to another bar. Finds another man, gets fucked against a wall. It hurts just the same but he's so drunk, he barely feels anything. He hears Will's voice again. It's angry, yells at him to stop. He's barely conscious of reality anymore, just goes to gay bars, drinks himself into a stupor and lets himself be fucked. Like Will did. It makes him feel closer, like he can understand him now. Ironically, the more he does it, the more he wants to keep doing it. Will was right. It's addictive, exhilarating. His body isn't even that sore. He takes it well.

A guy is talking to him. He doesn't even know his name.

"Wheeler?" he turns his head toward the familiar voice. Troy is looking at him with a puzzled expression, "What are you doing here?"

Mike ignores him. The other guy seems annoyed to have been disturbed and sends Troy a death glare before leaning back into Mike.

"Wanna go somewhere more private?" he asks, "My car's just here."

Mike nods into his drink, stumbles off the stool, goes to follow him. Troy stops him immediately.

"Woah, woah, woah! What exactly do you think you're doing?"

"Mind your own fucking business, Harrington," Mike slurs.

"Yeah, mind your fucking business," the other man echos.

Troy glares at him, "You shut up!" he turns to Mike, "And you... What the Hell is wrong with you?"

"I'm fine."

"No, you're not fine. You're nearly comatose. Do you know this guy?" Mike moans in drunken annoyance. Troy ignores him, "I asked you a question. Do you know this guy?"

“No.”

“Since when do you follow strangers in their car? Do you have any idea what’s going to happen in that car?!”

Mike chuckles, “I’m not an idiot!”

“Really? Allow me to doubt. Strongly.”

“I’m not a kid, Harrington. I know what I’m doing.”

Troy blinks. He looks like a father ready to scold their teenager, “Are you now? I didn’t know Will’s death upgraded your sexual orientation and made you stupider than you were! Didn’t even think this was possible!”

“Could you please just go away?” the other man suddenly asks, appreciating very little Troy’s interference, “He’s a grown guy. Can make his own decisions.”

“Uh no. Not in that current state of intoxication. He’s in no way to give a real consent and you know it, you disgusting pig!” the man opens his mouth to defend himself. Troy doesn’t let him. He grabs Mike by the shoulder, “Come over here!”

Mike whines. Troy ignores him, drags him for what seems to be an hour in the streets until they reach a building and Mike’s memory shuts down.

Will bends to kiss him. His lips are cold, soothing.

“Wake up, Mike,” he smiles at him and Mike’s heart warms up, “Wake up.”

He opens his eyes, blinking slowly. He’s on a couch, completely confused and groggy, his head and stomach hurting. He blinks a few times, refocusing on the past events, remembering the bar, the guy and Troy’s intervention. He didn’t even know Troy was around. A quick scan indicates he’s not home. He’s still where Troy brought him.

“Good morning sleeping beauty!”

He looks up, startled, toward the voice that just spoke, not facing Troy as he thought but Steve. He swallows. This is going to be bad. Steve used to give them shit when they were younger, especially to Dustin. He walks to him with freshly made muffins, painkillers and a mug of tea. He puts the tray on the coffee table in front of him, beckons Mike to eat. Mike takes a muffin, munches on it absentmindedly.

“Where is Troy?” he asks shyly.

“Gone to a job interview.”

Mike nods, focused on the muffin that slowly helps the hangover. He takes the painkillers with a full glass of water and winces. He knows Steve is looking at him, can feel his eyes burn through him.

“What time is it?”

“Almost 11am. You slept like a rock.”

Mike nods again, “What are you doing here? Where am I?”

“What I am doing here?! I live here dummy! This is my apartment!”

Mike blinks, “Your apartment?”

“Yes. Troy is staying with me for a few days. He brought you here as a gift because apparently I don’t have enough on my hands already!”

“Oh...” his shoulders slouch, his stomach turns with a wave of nausea, “He told you?”

“That he found you ready to do something really stupid and dangerous? Hell yes,” Mike swallows. Steve’s voice hardens, “What were you thinking? Do you realise how reckless this was? That guy could have hurt you! Something bad could have happened!”

Mike shrugs, “I’m fine.”

Steve studies him more intently, “It wasn't the first time, was it?” Mike doesn't answer, doesn't even look at him, “Jesus Mike! What is wrong with you?”

He shrugs again, "I'm exploring my sexuality..."

"With creepy guys, on the verge of ethylic coma?"

"It's a thing..."

"Yeah no... There's nothing healthy about this kind of behavior."

Mike chuckles into the muffin, "Are you giving me the anti gay talk?"

"This has nothing to do with being gay. You wanna have sex with guys? Fine with me. But do it healthily with nice, clean guys who'll take care of you. Not like this. This is fucked up. Guys who swoop on fragilized, drunk people are always to be avoided. They're sex predators."

"Will didn't mind..."

"Will wasn't an example!" Steve points out in a hard voice. Mike doesn't add anything. Steve joins him on the couch with a sigh, "Listen buddy, Will did things that led him to where he ended. He was damaged. Profoundly so. I should know because he almost became my brother in law for a while. I don't know if it's because of what happened with the Upside Down and the Mind Flayer... Probably... It killed him somehow and there was nothing we could do. Don't be like that. Don't fall into destructive coping mechanisms. They won't bring him back and they won't help you."

Tears begin to burn in his eyes, "I want him back."

"I know. We all do. He was my brother's boyfriend and my friend. I loved that kid. Sweet little Will. I'm actually the first he came out to," Steve remembers fondly, "He was fourteen at the time, still cute and innocent," he turns to look at Mike who's not looking back, "He had the most adorable crush on you. You were like his knight in shining armour. He thought this wasn't normal, that he was being a freak for liking you."

Mike remains silent, the tears falling on his cheeks, onto his lips, the sweet taste of the blueberry muffin mingling with salt and bitterness.

"Then he started doing his shit and it cost him his life. Don't do like

him. Will wouldn't want that. He loved you too much. If he saw you now, he'd be devastated," Mike gasps, remembering Will's tear-streaked face, "Do you even like it? What you do with those guys?" Steve asks again.

"No."

"Then don't do it. If you don't like something, you don't do it. Don't use sex as a weapon of self-destruction. This is never good."

"I loved Will..." he sobs.

"I know."

"I miss him."

"I know."

Mike snuffles, sipping from the tea, "It helps me. Being with those guys. It makes me feel closer to Will. Like I can make him live again, understand him."

"You're not his reincarnation, Mike. You're you. Don't hurt yourself over it."

The sobs explode into a series of hysterical cries he can't control, "I should have loved him like he wanted me to. I loved him too late. It was too late."

Steve embraces his shoulder, pulls him into a hug, "You took care of him till the very end. You made him so happy. And you stood by his side all his life."

"I broke his heart all his life."

"No. You didn't. Don't say that. You can't force yourself to be sexually attracted to someone if you're not. It doesn't work like this. Stop the guilt trip. There's no reason."

Mike doesn't add anything. He lets himself fall into Steve's embrace and cries until his eyes run dry and his body feels numb. He falls half asleep, in that same state of sumblerness as before. His senses catch

noises and smells and lights that shouldn't be here. He's floating inside his head, way above everything. Amidst this white chaos, the pressure is back. On his shoulder, his cheek, his eyes. It's warm, comforting, like a hug and it makes him smile.

"Will..." his heart misses a beat, "Where are you Will? Where have you gone?"

"I'm here Mike. I'm here."

Notes for the Chapter:

Don't hesitate to let me know what you thought of it.
I LOVE COMMENTS!

This chapter could have been a LOT longer than this.
Next chapter will involve more dark, more self-destructive Mike, BYLER and flashbacks.

Stay tuned :)

Also, for those who have Tumblr, I've just created one:
<https://mylesimeblr.tumblr.com/>

Feel free to add. I'm still trying to figure out how this works...